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IN DEFENSE OF THRIFT
DAVID BLANKENHORN

'A Wise Latina Woman'

Sonia Sotomayor and the politics of identity and grievance

BY JENNIFER RUBIN

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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As the Worlds Turn

As readers might have guessed, The Scrapbook was mightily impressed by President Obama's major address to the Muslim world last week in Cairo.

Not by the speech itself—which was suitably platitudinous and full of dubious assertions—but by the idea of the speech. In addressing "the Muslim world" the president was talking to over a billion people, not all of whom identify themselves primarily by their religion, most of whom don't live in the Arab world, and many of whom disdain and dislike other Muslims for a bewildering variety of reasons—including religion.

It's a little as if President Hu Jintao of China were to travel to, say, Rome or Canterbury to deliver a major address to Christendom.

But you have to give Barack Obama credit for presumption: Not only is he the first president to speak, directly and deliberately, to what he calls "the Muslim world," but he seems genuinely to believe that he is the first president in American history to visit a predominantly Muslim nation, to address a Muslim audience, or to preach religious tolerance. The Scrapbook concludes that Obama is either the most remarkable figure in history, as *Newsweek* and other respected news organizations claim, or a curious combination of arrogance and naïveté.

Let's suppose, however, that "the Muslim world" didn't react to the Cairo speech with politeness or mild mystification, as appears to be the case, but took Obama seriously and put aside all differences to answer his call for universal peace and brotherhood. In that case, The Scrapbook would not only applaud his address "to the Muslim world," but support a series of similarly expansive, ambitious orations to other gigantic, all-encompassing audiences.

A major presidential address from Barack Obama to "the animal kingdom," for example, could begin to heal wounds and settle differences nearly as old as life itself. "I know something about animals," the president could explain, "as the son of a man whose forebears roamed the savannas of East Africa with lions and giraffes, and as the proud custodian of a Portuguese water dog."

Having established his credentials, who better than President Obama to proclaim a new era in relations between beast and man?

> I am ashamed to say that I, too, have stamped out the life of the occasional ant, or swatted a fly, or chased an errant cockroach down the corridors of Harvard Law School. And as a child of democracy, I, too, have succumbed to the all-too-easy temptation to denounce honorable opponents as "snakes" or "weasels" or "rats"—never stopping to consider how those words must affect, and inevitably wound, proud members of the reptilian and mammalian communities, who ask only to live in peace and harmony with humankind.

This could be the start of something big, in The Scrapbook's view.

From the observatory steps at Mount Palomar, President Obama could deliver a major address to the inhabitants of the unknown worlds of interstellar space ("who have suffered the indignity of public hysteria, and unwarranted suspicion, and a thousand jokes and movies and uninformed speculation about 'flying saucers' and 'little green men' and 'UFO abductions' which, as we now know, were peaceful in intent").

Or with microscope in hand, he could talk to the unseen trillions of microbes who share our world, and assure them that our present concerns about swine flu are not directed at all germs and viruses but only at those bacteria "intent on doing harm." ♦

$306,000 Per Job

Scrapbook penpal Stephen Moore emails: "There's a basic concept in economics called 'opportunity cost'—which seems to be alien to the policymakers in Washington. Let's apply the concept to the auto bailouts and ask the question: What could we have done with all this money if we hadn't poured it into the bottomless pit of trying to keep General Motors and Chrysler solvent? Since the point of this federal life raft for the car companies is to protect the jobs, what if we had just liquidated the companies and given the money directly to the workers, if they promised never to build another car?

"The answer: Every GM and Chrysler worker in America could have walked away with a king's ransom check for $306,000.

"Here's how we arrived at this number. The latest GM rescue plan orchestrated by the Obama administration will require cash infusions of at least $13.6 billion—$6 billion to pay off the company's secured lenders, and $7.6 billion to keep the company operational. This comes on top of the Treasury Department's estimate last week of $24.7 billion in loans, buyouts and other guarantees already spent over the past six months. Another $4 billion must be added for the 'cash for clunkers' subsidy to buy new cars in the stimulus bill. Estimates range between $20 and $67 billion more that will be needed in the months ahead to pay for warranties, building those new energy efficient engines, and extending a series of bridge loans just to keep the lights on and make payroll. The grand total price tag is a range of $62 to $109 billion for GM, GMAC, and Chrysler.

"If we divide that number by the

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240,000 GM workers and the 39,000 Chrysler workers—we come up with a range of $222,000 to $391,000 bailout cost per employee. The midpoint estimate is $306,000. That is at least six times more generous than the early retirement package of $20,000 in cash and a $25,000 car voucher that GM is currently offering workers. Now this analysis admittedly ignores jobs that would be lost in other automotive firms if GM and Chrysler went out of business, but the former autoworkers would spend this money in ways that would create jobs elsewhere in the economy.

"Liquidation, in other words, would have been a better deal for the workers, the taxpayers, and perhaps even the bondholders, who could sell off the existing assets, which may be worth more than the 10 to 30 cents on the dollar that the government has offered.

"So why didn't we do this? Maybe it's because the only losers under this arrangement would have been the UAW brass and the AFL-CIO. And the Democrats have proven they won't cross them—at any cost." ♦

In Praise of *USA Today*

The Scrapbook can't help but notice that, since January 20, 2009, there's been a sharp decline in hard-hitting political coverage by many national newspapers. One notable exception, lately at least, is *USA Today*. Long derided by its more esteemed peers as "McPaper," *USA Today* has managed to keep its head above water, while those selfsame peers have gone in the tank for Obama.

Consider a pair of reports on the economy. In a front-page story on May 28, "First $4 B[illion] bypasses states hit hardest: Funds flow where jobs aren't scarce," Brad Heath reported that contracts doled out thus far with stimulus funds "have amounted to only about $7.42 per person on average in the eight states with unemployment rates higher than 10% last month." The next day, in another front-page story, "Leap in U.S. debt saddles taxpayers: Each household 12% deeper in the red," Dennis Cauchon reported that federal debt now amounts to $546,668 per household—four times what the average household owes on all other debt combined.

The paper's honest reporting goes beyond financial news. On June 1, Susan Page reported in a front-page story that a *USA Today*/Gallup poll shows that "by more than 2-1, those surveyed say Guantánamo shouldn't be closed"—a fact that underscores the difficulty Obama faces in closing the prison. That same day, *USA Today*'s William M. Welch began his story on the shooting of two U.S. soldiers in Arkansas by identifying the shooter, Abdul Hakim Mujahid Muhammad, as "a Muslim convert who said he was opposed to the U.S. military." In contrast, the *New York Times* report began by identifying the shooter as "A 23-year-old man upset about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan."

The Scrapbook believes the shooter's religious conversion may be more relevant to this story than his age, but will apologize to the *Times* if it comes to light that Muhammad was driven to kill by burdensome student-loan debt. ♦

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Casual

Home Mechanic

When I was 11 years old, my parents bought a two-flat apartment building. The building had a small front and back lawn, the care of which was turned over to me. I was no more than 10 minutes on the job when I found it even more boring than hearing about your children's high SAT scores. I rushed through the rest, and returned to our apartment to let my father know I had finished. Looking around, he noticed the patches of grass I had missed, how uneven I had left the edges of the lawn where it met the pavement, all the little clumps of grass I failed to rake up. "You know," my father said, calmly, "comes another Depression, you are exactly the kind of guy they let go first."

In Chicago grammar schools in those days, girls were required to take a course in home economics, where they learned the rudiments of cooking and sewing, and boys to take a course called home mechanics to acquaint them with tools. In home mechanics, we made bookends and lamps with bowling pins or fancy wine or whisky bottles as their bases. We did a fair amount of work with something called a coping saw. Every so often we used one of the large electric power saws; this was my first and last interaction with the firm of Black & Decker, apart from the few Black & Decker haircuts I've since had.

I did not cope at all well with the coping saw, and broke its slender blades fairly often. I had no patience for careful sanding, no interest in wiring. I took no pride in my ineptitude, as if it suggested that I was cut out for higher things. Nor did I look down on people who were good at home mechanics. I vaguely admired them, but not enough, apparently, to concentrate sufficiently at improving my own skills in this line.

Living in Little Rock, Arkansas, in the early 1960s, I often met men who tuned their own cars or did their own plumbing, and, in one instance, a guy who was building his own house. My admiration was no longer vague; I wished I had their talent, which, among other things, set them free from having to worry about being overcharged for jobs any normally (oh, hell, let's bring out the word) virile man ought to be able to do on his own but also gave them a sense of independence I lacked.

MATT COLLINS

Over the years, I acquired a tool box. In it I keep a number of screw drivers, a heavy hammer, a long and a flat-nosed pliers, a small drill, a complex wrench I have never learned how to manipulate. I do very minor repairs around our apartment. I hang pictures, I can stop a toilet from running after flushing, I can screw in this or hammer down that. I stay away from anything electrical, and plumbing isn't my specialty either. Fortunately I don't have roofs and air-conditioners and furnaces to deal with. If I had, good chance I would by now be dead.

Of late, a sense of decline and fall has taken over our apartment. Many little things have gone kerflooey, requiring repairs that I cannot provide: a few small chains to secure our casement windows are missing; a bathroom sink isn't draining well, despite all the solvents I've poured down it; a flap is missing from our garbage disposal; a ceiling fixture is out of commission because of a broken off halogen bulb that I have been unable to remove; a toilet requires jiggling after it is flushed; a small portable bathroom heater I bought from Hammacher Schlemmer needs a bracket to attach it to the wall. All this is beyond me and called for the services of a handyman.

The man we hired, an acquaintance of my wife's from the time when they both worked for a reference book company, arrived in a baseball cap with the name of a lumber company across the front. He wore not jeans but denim workmen's pants and a sweatshirt. His belt had a holster containing a select set of screwdrivers, probes, a small wrench, and pliers. He carried a clipboard, on which he made notes about the things I asked him to repair.

None of the jobs was unduly complex, at least not for him. He approached each with a nice analytical eye. He handled his tools with strength yet delicacy and respect. He had earlier been a copy editor, straightening out other people's broken sentences; now he was fixing broken appliances and appurtenances.

I didn't want to leave off watching him put our apartment back in order, so measured, so logical, so satisfying seemed his work. I thought I wouldn't mind signing on as his apprentice. Regretting my inability to do what he can, I finally pulled myself away, to return to the repair of my own broken sentences.

Joseph Epstein

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Commonweal and ND

Joseph Bottum's article in your May 18 issue, "God and Obama at Notre Dame," contained a number of serious inaccuracies regarding *Commonweal* magazine and the content on our blog, dotCommonweal.

After quoting from an editorial that appeared in *America* magazine, Bottom [*sic*] writes, "*America* was soon joined by the other old-line American Catholic magazine, *Commonweal*, which could not bring itself to express the least sympathy for the protesters." He then refers to an article from the Web site of the magazine he edits, *First Things*, that was excerpted, linked to, and discussed on the *Commonweal* blog (www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog/?p=3129). But his characterization of that discussion is misleading in several ways: First, a post by an individual blogger on dotCommonweal is not in any way an expression of *Commonweal* magazine's editorial stance. Comments from blog readers are even more obviously not to be interpreted as the voice of the magazine. And the claim that our bloggers and commenters have been uniformly unsympathetic to "the protesters" at Notre Dame in general, or to Lacy Dodd, the author of the *First Things* web article, in particular, is false. In fact, the blog post Bottum refers to described Dodd's article as "a moving testimony." And it gave rise to a lively discussion that included a wide variety of opinions, which Bottum's account completely mischaracterizes.

"*Commonweal* put a notice of the article on its own website, and 83 comments later, the young woman had been called everything but a slut," Bottum claims. In fact, Bottum is interpreting several commenters' respectful criticisms of Dodd's argument as attacks on her person and her personal decisions, which were in fact widely praised. When Bottum writes, "Her story was 'flimsy,' 'manipulative'..." he is apparently quoting the following sentences: "It's a moving story, but a flimsy argument." And "Bless the young woman for all she did to keep her baby, but her article is emotionally manipulative."

More seriously, Bottum distorts two phrases from another comment when he writes, "She was just 'a horny kid,' one of the 'victims of the Russian roulette moral theory of premarital sex' so rampant in the protesters' troglodyte version of Catholicism." In fact, the use of the former phrase did not refer to Ms. Dodd, and Bottum's interpretation of the latter phrase is totally inverted. Here is the original comment (which was addressed to another commenter on the blog):

"Your metaphor of the pregnant ND girl and the Blessed Mother also implies that the Holy Spirit was just a horny kid. Come off it.

"Do I feel sorry for the ND girl? Of course, and also for her child and even the

father. They are all victims of the Russian roulette moral theory of premarital sex—take a chance! :-(But contraceptives are not fail-safe, and it does a tremendous disservice to kids to let them think it's OK to act otherwise. The possibilities of negative consequences are simply to [*sic*] great to risk.

"Yes, the old teaching 'no marriage, no sex' is a hard saying. So?"

In context, the line Bottum quotes as an attack on the moral outlook of "the protesters" is in fact an endorsement of abstinence education. And his suggestion that Dodd was called "a horny kid" is simply false.

Bottum should know better than to pretend that comments on a blog post are representative of a magazine's editorial stance. But if he insists on using blog comments to make his argument, he ought to make sure he doesn't misconstrue their meaning. In this case, he has not served your readers accurately or well.

The Editors, *Commonweal*
New York, N.Y.

Joseph Bottum Responds: It's a nebulous signature, that "The Editors of *Commonweal*." Paul, is that you? Matt? Peggy? Anyway, whoever the authors are, I know they're authentic, since they follow the old *Commonweal* tradition of misspelling my name. In the second paragraph of their letter to The Weekly Standard, they call me "Bottom," which is how they printed my byline, years ago, when I wrote for them and how they've named me ever since.

Now they're upset because I included the *Commonweal* gang among those who sided against the protesters at Notre Dame. Is there any real doubt about that? *Commonweal* magazine, together with its bloggers and commenters, wanted Barack Obama to win the 2008 election. They wanted Catholics to vote for him, and they wanted Catholics to celebrate him, and they wanted the pro-life protesters to go away.

Thus, when Lacy Dodd wrote for the *First Things* website a powerful personal story about the pro-abortion message sent by Notre Dame's honoring of the president, the bloggers and commenters at *Commonweal* found it embarrassing. Every word I quoted appeared on the *Commonweal* site, and all of them in a context of serious anger at Ms. Dodd. Mostly what they couldn't stand is the possibility that her vision would become the standard picture of President Obama's visit to a Catholic school, and so they tried to bury her. The words I quoted were a precise and fair summary of the expressed views of *Commonweal* and its writers.

So, come on, Paul and Matt and Peggy—all you Editors of *Commonweal*. You chose a side during the Notre Dame controversy. As it happens, I think you chose the wrong side, elevating the glamour of politics over the common sense of ordinary Catholics, and the princes of the world over the Church, and the rule of the strongest over the rights of the weakest and most vulnerable. But choose it, you did, and stuck with it, you are.

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the weekly Standard

The Bailout State

It's not every day that you get to witness the birth of a new social system. But General Motors' June 1 bankruptcy, and the company's likely reorganization under the ownership of the U.S. Treasury, does suggest the arrival of a novel relationship—at least for the United States—between the citizen and his government. We've all encountered the national security state, where individuals give up a degree of civil liberty in exchange for protection from internal and external threats. And we live in a welfare state, where the government imposes obligations on certain individuals, in the form of taxes and duties, in order to secure basic social benefits for the entire populace. But the national security and welfare states are oh-so twentieth-century. This is a new day. This is the dawn of the bailout state.

In the bailout state, the federal government takes over failed private entities in order to maintain overall economic stability. Sometimes the companies already had ties to government, such as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the Government Sponsored Enterprises (GSEs) that the Treasury seized—sorry, "took into conservatorship"—last summer. Sometimes the bailout state's beneficiaries are businesses like AIG, Citigroup, Bank of America, and the other financial institutions wedded to government through the Troubled Asset Relief Program (or TARP). Other times, the beneficiaries are unions: the United Auto Workers (UAW) whose members' jobs at Chrysler and the "new GM" will survive thanks to government largesse.

The wards of the bailout state have more in common than government support. After all, the government has supported the railroad, agriculture, and steel industries for a long time. But not through direct bailouts. No, the salient feature of the bailout state is government ownership and control.

At first the bailouts were meant to pick up the pieces that the financial crisis left in its wake. The current recession, the worst in a generation, began in the residential real estate market, spread to the banks' balance sheets, and eventually caused a collapse in short-term business lending and consumer demand. Government intervention in the GSEs was meant to stave off a total mortgage meltdown. The TARP's original purpose was to buy troubled assets from the banks and thereby shield them from insolvency. Without banks, there's no credit. Without credit, there's no economy.

GARY LOCKE

Somewhere along the line, however, the game changed. GM and Chrysler's problems have little to do with the financial crisis. The U.S. car industry's woes stem from its paleolithic corporate culture, the burdensome legacy costs of generous pensions and health care for UAW retirees, a persistent failure to anticipate consumer preferences, and onerous federal regulations. The great recession landed the killer blow. When consumers began to save rather than spend money for the first time in decades, the car business was the first casualty. No one showed up at the showroom anymore. GM and Chrysler went under.

In the past, the U.S. government allowed private companies to fall apart, confident that new ones would rise in their place. Not the bailout state. The feds already had protected the GSEs and Wall Street. Why not Detroit? The price is "only" $110 billion, compared with trillions to the banks and in guarantees to Fannie and Freddie. The Rust Belt economy, moreover, has been reeling for some time. Liquidating GM and Chrysler could wreak havoc on parts suppliers and

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other businesses that depend on the auto giants. Better to cushion the blow.

Political connections helped. The economist Simon Johnson wrote a long essay in the *Atlantic* recently in which he argued that government and Wall Street became too cozy over the last decades, giving us both the crash and the TARP. The same logic applies to the Democratic party and the UAW. There simply was no way a pro-labor Democratic president from a Great Lakes state was going to allow GM and Chrysler to vanish and the gold-plated benefits the UAW had secured over the generations to disappear as well. True, the unions will have to sacrifice some as part of the bankruptcy. But nowhere near as much as the creditors, on whose confidence markets depend.

In the bailout state, politically connected groups secure government ownership of enterprises that otherwise would go belly-up. What does Uncle Sam get in return? The ability to transform once-private companies into tools of economic and social policy. The GSEs are put to work handing out mortgages to applicants who might otherwise be rejected. The banks are forced to lend so that consumers will spend, even though excessive lending and spending is what got us into trouble in the first place. The Beltway bosses reduce executive pay at all politicized companies in order to tamp down populist outrage and pursue equality.

The autos will be the most ambitious instrument yet. For starters, last week Representative Barney Frank strong-armed GM CEO Fritz Henderson into keeping a warehouse in his district open. The Obama administration says that it wants to sell off its GM shares as soon as possible. But that will be difficult, because (a) the unions will try to stop any arrangement that leaves members in the lurch, and (b) abandoning the car companies would mean forswearing control over their product. Again, the administration says it doesn't want such control. Hogwash. Only through ownership will the government be able to eliminate gas guzzlers from the domestic fleet. Government Motors makes both the labor and environmental lobbies happy. And if consumers won't buy the new green cars, then government will sweeten the deal with subsidies for fuel-efficient vehicles—or impose a gas tax that makes you think twice before buying that SUV.

There's only one complication. All of this is both misguided and unpopular. American voters have serious misgivings about the TARP and the auto bailout. Those concerns likely will become even more pronounced as government embeds itself deeper into the banking and car sectors. In time, the electorate may even vote for politicians who stand with private enterprise. The political party with a track record of opposition to government overreach, overspending, and overindebtedness—and with proposals to roll back the bailout state—will benefit. It won't be the Democrats.

—Matthew Continetti

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President Obama, with Majority Leader Harry Reid, inspects an array of solar panels in Las Vegas.

JASON REED/ REUTERS / LANDOV

No Energy from this Executive

Watch what Obama does, not what he says.

BY FRED BARNES

"As I've often said, in the short term, as we transition to renewable energy," President Obama stated in April, "we can and should increase our domestic production of oil and natural gas. . . . We still need more oil, we still need more gas. If we've got some here in the United States that we can use, we should find it and do so in an environmentally sustainable way."

Does anyone believe Obama was serious about this? Given his practice of misdirection—saying one thing, doing another—no one should have. Now, nearly five months into the Obama presidency, it's clear he didn't mean a word of it. His administration is impeding, not promoting, increased production of oil and gas, as it is of coal and nuclear power.

This is a crazy policy. It's likely to drive up gasoline and electricity prices while making America more dependent than ever on foreign oil—three bad trends. Energy independence becomes still another of Obama's stated policies being championed in words but not deeds.

Higher prices on oil and gas may make wind and solar power, the renewable sources of energy the Obama administration is promoting, more competitive, but only slightly. They would still be heavily reliant on large subsidies from the federal government, face severe technical problems, and produce energy only intermittently.

At the moment, demand for oil and gas is down and so is our capacity to produce them. As the economy improves, demand is bound to rise quickly. But capacity can be increased only gradually, and that's if more production is being encouraged rather than prevented.

To think that wind and solar or other alternative fuels can fill the energy gap requires a belief in what Adriel Bettelheim of *Congressional Quarterly* has called the "Tinkerbell effect," as in *Peter Pan*. It consists of believing something will happen just because you wish it would.

Wind and solar now provide less than 1 percent of America's energy needs. Obama has called for doubling this in three years, still leaving them as marginal sources of energy. The likelihood, based on projections by experts, is that oil and gas must be relied on overwhelmingly to meet the country's energy needs for at least two more decades.

But amazingly enough, the Obama administration is worried about domestic "overproduction" of oil and gas. According to its budgetary "green book," that would be "detrimental to longterm energy security and is also inconsistent with the administration's policy of reducing carbon emissions and encouraging the use of renewable energy sources."

So Obama has proposed removing all tax incentives to produce oil and gas, slapping a 13 percent excise tax on all energy derived from the Gulf of Mexico, and increasing the corporate tax rate by 3 percent on all companies that produce or process oil and gas.

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Then there's what he's already done, starting with a delay for 180 days (and maybe more) in the five-year, outer continental shelf leasing plan.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar isn't excited about exploring and drilling for oil and gas. He boasted instead last week to *Politico* about finalizing "the rules for the development of offshore wind [power] here in the United States."

Salazar has cancelled 77 oil and gas leases that had been issued in Utah. He halted plans to lease the oil shale region in five states after a Shell Oil study concluded there are 1 to 2 trillion barrels there of recoverable oil. He declared the listing of the yellow-billed loon as an endangered species justified, which could limit the development of a huge oil-rich region off the west coast of Alaska.

But that's not all. The Obama administration has decided not to issue leases for gas well drilling on the Roan Plateau in Colorado and has shown little interest in developing the "Chukchi" region offshore north Alaska. (It is bogged down in the permitting process.)

Nuclear power? Obama has often said he's for it, but not until a way to deal with waste from nuclear power plants is found. In fact, one has been found and so designated by Washington at Yucca Mountain in Nevada. Obama, however, has proposed to eliminate all federal funds for building a waste site there.

Coal? A Bush administration rule covering mountaintop coal mining was thrown out by the Obama administration as "legally defective."

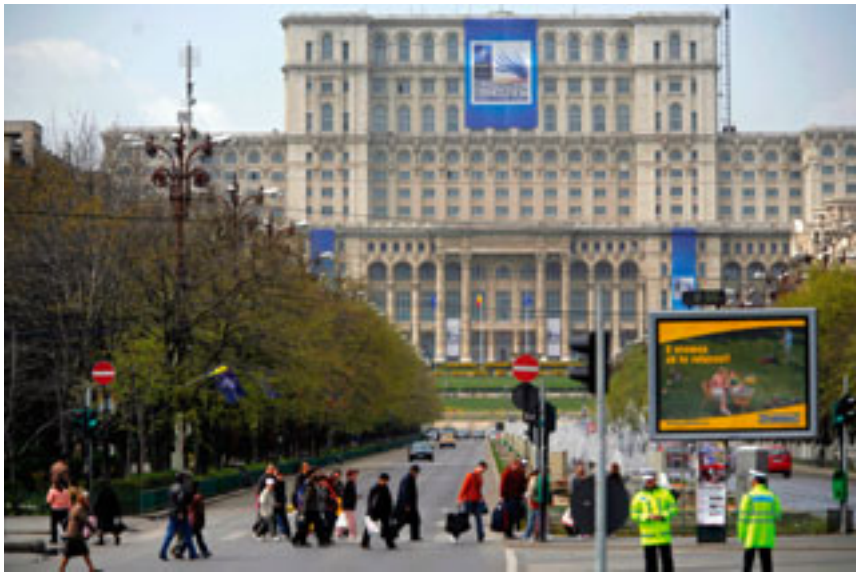
One way to reduce the use of coal for electricity (thus limiting greenhouse gas emissions) is conversion of power plants to natural gas. For that to happen, the logical policy would be to spur more gas production. But that's not the Obama policy. On the contrary, the Obama policy is to make gas, oil, and coal more difficult to produce and more expensive for consumers. As for more nuclear power, the policy is, in effect: Forget it.

True, this isn't the way Obama describes his energy policies. With Obama, the trick is to watch what he does, not what he says. ♦

Russia's Sphere of Coercion

The bear was only hibernating.

BY CATHY YOUNG



Nicolae Ceausescu slept here: Romania's Parliament Palace

REUTERS / MIHAI BARBU / LANDOV

Bucharest, Romania

Until last month, I had never heard of the Economic Forum, a Polish-run venture whose annual conference in the resort town of Krynica has been described in the European press as *the* gathering place for the political elites of Central and Eastern Europe. Then in late May, I found myself in attendance (as a panelist, unpaid except for travel reimbursement) at one of the group's smaller meetings: the fifth annual Europe-Russia Forum, held in Romania's capital. I was not quite sure what to expect from the event, whose Russian participants were mostly of the official or semi-official kind. What I got was a fascinating glimpse into Russia's continuing struggle to define its post-Communist identity and its prickly relationship with its former satellites.

The conference venue added a touch of eerie symbolism. Bucharest is still haunted by the legacy of Nicolae Ceausescu, whose barbaric rule made Romania a hellhole even by the low standards of the Soviet bloc. The Europe-Russia Forum met in the building that is the most conspicuous legacy of his rule: the Palace of the Parliament, formerly the House of the People. Ceausescu had it built in his final years as both personal residence and seat of government, razing much of the city's historic district to make room for the gargantuan edifice. After his overthrow and execution, some wanted to dynamite it. Yet it still stands, a monument to megalomania and to the dark age from which this part of the world only recently emerged.

Has a different kind of dark age descended on Russia? Most Russian

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speakers pooh-poohed the idea. At the opening session, Konstantin Simonov, president of the Russian Center for Current Politics—a think tank with strong Kremlin ties—introduced his report on Russia in 2008, which, he claimed, avoided the pitfalls of either a too-bleak or too-rosy picture. His grounds for optimism included the fact that the war in Georgia had not led to a reimposition of the Iron Curtain or to wholesale militarization. (I was reminded of the old Soviet joke in which the pessimist says, "Things can't possibly get worse," while the optimist retorts, "Oh yes, they can!") In a deft balancing act, Simonov asserted that President Dmitry Medvedev was more "Western-oriented" than his predecessor (puppet master?) Vladimir Putin but also decried the "'good Medvedev, bad Putin' stereotype."

Members of Russia's political establishment are acutely conscious of their country's image as the bad guy in last year's war in the Caucasus and the 2009 "gas wars." The Russia-Georgia conflict was frequently and defensively brought up. The Russian speakers' claims amounted to this: Despite biased coverage by the Western media, it is now clear that Georgia's Mikheil Saakashvili was to blame; Russia did the only thing it could have done; and the unilateral recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence was either the right and proper thing to do or the unfortunate but natural consequence of the Kosovo precedent.

"Today, many people in Eastern Europe see us as an authoritarian system, an analogue of the Soviet Union," declared Duma member Adalbi Shkhagoshev of the ruling United Russia party, participating in a panel on the prospects for partnership between Russia and the European Union. "This is not true. We want dialogue and are ready for it." He did acknowledge that Russia needs to be "more careful" abroad and listen respectfully to neighbors.

Alas, many other statements from the Russian speakers did little to dispel their country's reputation as an authoritarian bully. One telling moment occurred on a coffee break when I joined a conversation between Sergei Semyonov, director of a government-affiliated Russian institute of public administration, and a female Estonian parliament member whom Semyonov introduced as a delegate from "another part of post-Soviet space."

"Excuse me," the Estonian MP said firmly, "a full-fledged member of the European Union." "No, no," Semyonov replied with a smirk, "whatever you say, it's post-Soviet space." Moments later, he asserted with a straight face that Russia's initial reports of 1,500 South Ossetians slaughtered by Georgian invaders had never been disproved and that the current official estimate of about 150 dead refers only to Russian military casualties.

At the forum's opening session, Valery Fedorov, director of the state-run Russian Public Opinion Research Center, maintained with an equally straight face that Russia had successfully met the challenge of presidential transition. Medvedev's "election," he argued, was legitimate since most Russians genuinely embraced him as a successor to Putin, the man who had rebuilt not only the economy but the self-respect of a people traumatized by "the disintegration of our great country." Besides, Fedorov explained, competitive elections mattered little to Russians since nothing good had come of them in the past.

The next day, Fedorov reappeared at the Russia-EU partnership session to offer some stock phrases about the twilight of the American empire along with a gloomy prognosis: The differences in values between Russia and the EU were far too great to achieve partnership. "Everyone" in Russia, he said, shared a basic "'don't tell us how to run our country'" outlook, which inevitably conflicted with the European paradigm of integration and "the primacy of the secular state and the individual"; at best, one could hope for "reasonably amicable coexistence."

My own panel, on democracy and the media, gave further cause for pessimism. Moderator Igor Pavlovsky, deputy editor of Russia's leading wire service, Regnum, delivered this gem: "I'm always annoyed by all these international ratings and indexes of freedom of the press. For some reason we're supposed to accept them as a universal standard. Why not an index of spirituality in the press?"

A few semi-dissenting Russian voices came from delegates from the "Right Cause," a liberal party launched recently with the Kremlin's blessing. One of its leaders, Vladimir Nikitin, deplored the Russian tendency to see liberal democratic values as "a cynical cover for naked self-interest" and even suggested that Russia's foreign policy was often driven by neurotic overcompensation. Yet the loyal opposition had little in the way of a positive program to offer beyond generalities about cooperation on global problems and the hypothetical prospects for Russia's eventual integration into Europe.

On the EU side, the frustration was palpable. Even the more accommodating representatives of "Old Europe" lamented Russia's tendency to see any EU attempt to build ties with former Soviet republics as "anti-Russian." Speakers from "post-Soviet space" and Eastern Europe—who included some notable figures, among them Poland's former president Alexander Kwasniewski and legendary anti-Communist resistance leader Lech Walesa—were more openly wary. They wondered aloud what visions of future European integration had to do with Russian policy today and on what principles pragmatic collaboration with Russia could be built. Romanian president Traian Basescu, who hosted the forum, complained about Russia's attitude toward "the common neighborhood" and its insistence on a right to a "sphere of influence"; what was needed instead, he said, was to build "spheres of trust."

This remark led to one of the forum's moments of unintentional humor near the end of its second day. A Russian discussant attempted to quote, approvingly, Basescu's comment; unfortunately, "*sfery doveriya*"—spheres of trust—came out as "*sfery davleniya*," "spheres of coercion."

"That," said the discussant, quickly correcting himself, "is quite a slip." Somewhere, the ghost of Freud was smiling. ♦

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Two Sudans Are Better Than One

How to end the civil war and weaken the Islamists.

BY ROGER KAPLAN

Modern Sudan is a complex geographical expression more than a country. Annexed by Egypt's Albanian ruler Mehmet Ali in the 1820s, it was poorly managed from the beginning, and the country's administration grew increasingly corrupt under Mehmet Ali's sons. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, it became Britain's problem, as protecting the route to India was a supreme concern of British policy.

Disgruntled Sudanese soon went to war with the British under the leadership of a man named Muhammad Ahmad ibn as Sayyid Abd Alla, Mahdi ("the guide"), a kind of proto-fascist Wahhabi preacher. The Mahdists and their fierce army overwhelmed the legendary English soldier "Chinese" Gordon in 1885 in Khartoum, established an Islamist state (to use an anachronism) for 15 years, and did not pay the price of trampling on the Union Jack until Herbert Kitchener returned in 1898-99 and gave them what-for at the battle of Omdurman, Khartoum's sprawling northern suburb. His troops made use of a famous machine gun, the Maxim, which could fire 600 rounds a minute, pretty serious firepower at the time.

The British Empire was chiefly interested in the eastern regions of Sudan, extending south as far as Khartoum. The colonial administrators worked to protect the sources of the Nile and the approaches to the Suez Canal. The southern savannahs and forests of the country mattered chiefly as buffer zones: The British wanted no French or Belgian intrusions from their colonies in central Africa and Congo.

Recall that much of French West Africa was originally called Sudan, an Arabic word for black. The Sudan is where black Africa begins and Arabized Africa ends; though, looked at another way, you could say the northern reaches of Sudan are where Africanized Arabia begins. Be that as it may, the Arabs who in our own time lead the government of Sudan (known as the GoS) look more African than Arabian, but they speak Arabic and practice the Muslim religion.

> No knowledgeable observers doubt that in a free and fair referendum, a large southern majority would vote for secession. But no one believes it can be free and fair, even assuming the government of Sudan does not find excuses to postpone it indefinitely.

The Africans who lead the government of the autonomous region of South Sudan (known as the GoSS), however, look even more African than the northerners. They are black as coal and fabulously handsome. Their women are stunningly beautiful, characteristically tall and graceful. The South Sudanese speak their own languages as well as, often, Arabic. Most educated Sudanese, north and south, speak an English that is better than that heard in London or Washington. The southerners practice the Christian religion, usually in its Methodist or Anglican expression, a consequence of Victorian missionary activity.

As they laid the groundwork for the departure from east of Suez after World War II, the British made a stab at holding on to Sudan, but the Egyptians, under the leadership of a new government led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, undercut them by renouncing Egypt's claims. Though the British had been running Sudan, they were legally and officially doing so under Egyptian authority, even if in practice they treated the country as a colony, so they packed up and left. The nation became independent in 1956, and, except between 1972 and 1983, there has been a north-south civil war going on ever since.

It is this civil war which the Bush administration helped put an unstable lid on by brokering a Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. Under the terms of this treaty, the south, which the Anglo-Egyptians had always treated as an entity separate from the provinces to the north of Khartoum (going so far as to formally prohibit movement of southerners north and northerners south), has its own government and may secede in 2010.

No knowledgeable observers doubt that in a free and fair referendum (which the peace agreement calls for), a large southern majority would vote for secession. The problem is that the vote, and notably the census on which it would be based, is under the administrative control of the GoS, not the GoSS, and no one believes it can be free and fair, even assuming the GoS does not find excuses to postpone it indefinitely. As matters stand, most of the key "benchmarks" that were specified in the peace agreement as the necessary steps leading up to a vote on secession have not been met. These include technical issues such as conducting the census and setting up a credible electoral commission, as well as political issues such as deciding how the two states will maintain friendly, or at least peaceful, relations.

The benchmarks have not been met because, first of all, the government in Khartoum, led for the last 20 years by

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Omar al-Bashir, has lately been busy massacring and ethnically cleansing Sudan's western state of Darfur. This is a complicated and ugly business, reflecting Darfur's tribal and religious sociology, but what is not complicated is Bashir's emulation of the late unlamented Slobodan Milosevic of the former Yugoslavia. Bashir may be destined for a similarly grim end (Milosevic had a heart attack while awaiting trial at the International Criminal Court at The Hague; the same court issued a warrant for Bashir's arrest on charges of war crimes in March). However, unlike the Serb strongman, who had some backing from a weakened Russia, Bashir has broad international support from the states of the Arab League and can appeal to Muslims worldwide that he is being pursued because of his religion.

The second reason the benchmarks have not been met is that perhaps the key economic provision of the peace agreement concerns the exploitation of the oil fields that lie, as luck would have it, astride north and south. The agreement calls for these resources to be shared, even now (during the period of southern autonomy), by both the GoS and the GoSS, but the GoSS has not been getting its share. With violence on the rise along a demarcation line between north and south that has yet to be officially agreed upon (another of the benchmarks) because of northern obfuscation, southerners fear the GoS wants to foment enough trouble to justify outright annexation of the oil producing regions.

The south has found it difficult to resist these depredations. Partly to blame for this is the death of John Garang, the charismatic southern leader and a powerful voice for southern unity and peaceful transition toward independence. He was killed in an air crash just after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed.

The government in Khartoum views the implementation of the agreement as a serious economic threat and cannot but view the south's leadership difficulties as an opportunity to subvert its own commitments. After years of imposing its will by violence, enforcing fundamentalist versions of Islamic law, supporting terrorist organizations like al Qaeda, and pursuing other enlightened measures, the Bashir regime has little popular support.

Most of Sudan's oil is bought by China, which also has invested heavily in energy resources development in the disputed area. But the Chinese, who have defended Bashir against the attempts by the U.N. to bring him to heel on Darfur, are pragmatists, and they believe that if they could deal all these years with Khartoum, there is no reason why they should not be able to deal henceforth with Juba (the large town in Sudan's extreme south, near Uganda, which serves as the capital of the autonomous south).

In the long term, it would seem Sudan, after a history of suffering, may have found a window toward a brighter future. But in the short run, the situation on the ground is grim. Renewed fighting between north and south is likely; indeed, it has begun already in the form of trouble in oil-producing regions and inter-tribal conflicts in the south, allegedly incited by the Bashir government.

Salva Kiir, South Sudan's president (who under the peace agreement is Sudan's vice president), said recently that such conflicts are, unfortunately, traditional, as clans and villages fight over cattle, grazing rights, and women. What he added, however, was that the level of violence, the methods used by raiding parties, and the weapons available clearly point to outside encouragement, if not outright leadership. This can explode into full-scale renewal of north-south violence, combined with tribal war, if not stopped in its tracks.

Observers point out that on the military side the Bashir regime is not very strong. A raid by a Darfuri rebel group last year reached the outskirts of Khartoum before being thrown back, and early this year Israel destroyed an Iranian convoy of munitions and arms, destined for Hamas in Gaza, as it transited through Sudan. Say what you will about the fact that these two astonishing events were hardly noticed in the United States—Israel made no secret of its strike, wanting to call attention to Iran's export of violence—they speak volumes about the Bashir government's lack of military preparedness.

By contrast, notes J. Peter Pham, an Africanist and defense expert at

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James Madison University, the southerners, while desperately poor and ill-equipped, held off the northerners for decades, and even the Darfuris are still standing. And this is despite absolutely fantastic crimes committed against the civilian populations in both regions. If they had antiaircraft capability, the hardened cadres of the SPLA (the [Southern] Sudan People's Liberation Army, founded by Garang and others in the 1970s) say they could handle the one asset Bashir holds that might beat them into submission, air power.

What next? Under the Bush administration, the United States did more for Africa than during any previous period. Funding for health and education resources was vastly increased. Security arrangements grew apace—notably initiatives to curb Islamist infiltration across northern Africa and the creation of an Africa Command to institutionalize military cooperation between the U.S. Army and eligible African defense establishments. There is no indication the Obama administration is taking exception to these policies, which, while relatively minor in relation to the region's problems and the rapidly growing challenges from other powers with an interest in Africa, nevertheless are widely appreciated on the continent.

The U.S. interests in Sudan are not difficult to discern. Diplomats and observers acknowledge that by every historical and sociological measure, Sudan as it is presently traced on the map has little meaning or even viability, but that two Sudans would each possess at least a certain coherence. The northern half, pro-al Qaeda and anti-Western, would be weakened; the south, pro-Western and potentially a base for sustained economic growth in east and central Africa, would be strengthened.

Of course, the emergence of two independent Sudans remains hypothetical, but a drastic geographic makeover would offer an opportunity for a fresh start. ♦

The Man Who Cried Doom

NASA's James Hansen is the least-muzzled climate alarmist in America. BY MICHAEL GOLDFARB

James Hansen at a global warming protest in Coventry, England

NEWSCOM

It's been more than 20 years since James Hansen first warned America of impending doom. On a hot summer day in June 1988, Hansen, the head of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, came to Washington to announce before a Senate committee that "the greenhouse effect has been detected and it is changing our climate now."

The greenhouse effect would have looked obvious enough to anyone watching on television. The senators conducting the hearing, including Al Gore, had turned the committee room into an oven. That day it was a balmy 98 degrees, and as former Colorado senator Timothy Wirth later revealed, the committee members "went in the night before and opened all the windows. And so when the hearing occurred, there was not only bliss, which is television cameras and [high ratings], but it was really hot."

Hansen has been a star ever since. On the 20th anniversary of his testimony to Congress and still serving in the same role at NASA, Hansen was invited back for an encore performance where he warned that time was running out. He also conducted a media tour that included calling for the CEOs of fossil fuel companies, including ExxonMobil and Peabody Energy, to be put on trial for "high crimes against humanity and nature."

If you hear the echo of Nuremberg in those trials, it's because Hansen doesn't shy away from Holocaust metaphors to make his point. In 2007,

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Hansen testified before the Iowa Utilities Board not in his capacity as a government employee but "as a private citizen, a resident of Kintnersville, Pennsylvania, on behalf of the planet, of life on Earth, including all species." Hansen told the board that "if we cannot stop the building of more coal-fired power plants, those coal trains will be death trains—no less gruesome than if they were boxcars headed to crematoria, loaded with uncountable irreplaceable species."

More recently, but presumably still in his capacity as a private citizen and defender of the Earth, Hansen wrote an op-ed for the *Guardian* in which he described coal-fired power plants as "factories of death." This on the heels of testifying in a British court on behalf of six Greenpeace activists on trial for causing $60,000 in criminal damage to a coal-fired power station in England. The Greenpeace activists had offered climate change as a "lawful excuse" for their actions and with Hansen's helpful testimony were acquitted of all charges. Less than six months later, Hansen—a federal employee—would call for "the largest display of civil disobedience against global warming in U.S. history" as part of a protest at the Capitol power plant in Washington.

Hansen, by his own count, has conducted more than 1,400 interviews in recent years. Yet Hansen would also insist, in a speech just days before the 2004 presidential election, that the Bush administration had "muzzled" him because of his global warming activism. When asked about this contradiction in 2007, Hansen told Rep. Darrell Issa that "for the sake of the taxpayers, they should be availed of my expertise. I shouldn't be required to parrot some company line."

But Hansen has never parroted the company line. As the head of NASA's Weather and Climate Research Program from 1982 to 1994, John Theon was James Hansen's supervisor. Theon says that Hansen's testimony in 1988 was "a huge embarrassment" to NASA, and he remains skeptical of Hansen's predictions. "I don't have much faith in the models," Theon says, pointing to the "huge uncertainty in the role clouds play." Theon describes Hansen as a "nice, likeable fellow," but worries "he's been overcome by his belief—almost religious—that he's going to save the world."

William Gray, a professor of atmospheric science at Colorado State University, also describes Hansen's belief in a man-made global-warming catastrophe as "almost religious" and says he "never understood how [Hansen] got such a strong voice" in the debate. Gray's efforts to predict hurricanes also lead him to question Hansen's computer models. "He doesn't have the clouds in right, and he doesn't have the deep ocean circulation," Gray says. "It's a giant scam in my view."

Hansen, by his own count, has conducted more than 1,400 interviews in recent years. He's become a 'media darling,' says William Gray. Yet Hansen would also insist that the Bush administration had 'muzzled' him.

Yet Hansen has been well rewarded by the scientific community for his efforts, winning the American Meteorological Society's highest award for atmospheric science earlier this year. Gray says he was "appalled at that," particularly in light of the fact that Hansen wasn't even trained as a meteorologist. Gray distributed a paper describing the choice as a "hijacking" of the AMS: "By presenting Hansen with its highest award, the AMS implies it agrees with his faulty global temperature projections and irresponsible alarmist rhetoric," Gray wrote.

Indeed, Roy Spencer, who served as the senior scientist for climate studies at NASA's Marshall Center, puts Hansen "at the extreme end of global warming alarmism." Spencer doesn't know of anyone "who thinks it's a bigger problem than [Hansen] does." Spencer, a meteorologist by training and a skeptic of man-made global warming, was genuinely muzzled during the Clinton administration. "I would get the message down through the NASA chain [of command] of what I could and couldn't say in testimony."

Spencer left NASA with little fuss for a job at the University of Alabama in 2001, but he still seems in awe of Hansen's ability to do as he pleases. "For many years Hansen got away with going around NASA rules, and they looked the other way because it helped sell Mission to Planet Earth," the NASA research program studying human effects on climate. Spencer figures that "at some point, someone in the Bush administration said 'why don't you start enforcing your rules?'"

Gray says that Hansen's "testimony is not working out" anyway. There's been a "slight cooling since 2001. . . . They're scrambling," he says. And indeed Hansen got caught with his hand in the cookie jar in 2007, when Stephen McIntyre, the man who debunked the infamous "hockey stick" graph showing stable Northern Hemisphere surface temperatures for most of the last millennia before a sharp upturn, found a flaw in Hansen's numbers. McIntyre analyzed NASA's temperature records for the last century and found that, contrary to Hansen's charts, 1998 was not the hottest year on record. That honor belongs to 1934, and five of the ten hottest years on record are now found prior to World War II.

Theon says the same kind of models that now predict runaway warming were predicting runaway cooling prior to 1975, when the popular fear was not melting ice caps but a new ice age, and "not one model predicted the cooling we've had since 1998." Spencer insists "it's all make believe—if you took one look at the assumptions that go into this, you'd laugh." But none of that seems to matter too much. "Gore was in his corner and now the president is in his corner," Theon says. "They don't understand what the hell is going on." ♦

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'A Wise Latina Woman'

The context shows that Judge Sotomayor meant what she said

By Jennifer Rubin

Not since Rose Mary Woods made "18½" famous has a number so absorbed the attention of the media and political establishment. But with President Barack Obama's nomination of Second Circuit judge Sonia Sotomayor to the Supreme Court to replace retiring Justice David Souter, Washington has become transfixed by "32"—the number of words in a startling passage from the Judge Mario G. Olmos Memorial Lecture that Sotomayor delivered at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law in 2001 and published the following spring in the *Berkeley La Raza Law Journal*.

The sentence that set off a furious round of spin by supporters and of criticism by opponents of Sotomayor's nomination reads as follows: "I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived that life."

This sort of ethnic condescension is routinely bandied about among academics and those who style themselves "civil rights" advocates. But in general public parlance it is problematic in the extreme. As a political analyst confided privately, the sentence in question "is utterly absurd, and I say that as someone who believes that diversity is a good thing in Court appointments and just about everything else. . . . No one's gender or ethnicity bestows an edge in wisdom. What a fatuous concept."

The hapless White House press secretary Robert Gibbs at first refused to address Sotomayor's words. By the end of the week though he declared, "I think she'd say that her word choice in 2001 was poor." Sotomayor herself, according to Senator Dianne Feinstein, said that "if you read on and read the rest of my speech you wouldn't be concerned with it but it was a poor choice of words."

The following week the excuse of inadvertence unraveled. Sotomayor had used similar or identical words in speeches between 1994 and 2003, the most recent at Seton Hall, in which the same "wise Latina" formulation was used. And Sotomayor is a meticulous draftsman, as she explained in a separate 1994 speech on the importance of clear writing, in which she boasted that she repeatedly edits her work.

However, the president had already weighed in, pronouncing, "I'm sure she would have restated it. But if you look in the entire sweep of the [speech] that she wrote, what's clear is that she was simply saying that her life experiences will give her information about the struggles and hardships that people are going through that will make her a good judge."

But that is precisely not what the entire sweep of the speech conveys. Indeed, Sotomayor took nearly 4,000 words to say the opposite. The president's characterization of the speech is as false as Sotomayor's reassurances to Feinstein are misleading. The White House is no doubt banking on the media and public's unwillingness to seek out the *Berkeley La Raza Law Journal* and read Sotomayor's musings in their entirety. In contrast to Judge Richard Paez of the Ninth Circuit, a liberal Hispanic appellate judge who addressed the same Berkeley audience, Sotomayor propounded not warm and fuzzy feelings of ethnic pride but radical views of multiculturalism and of judging itself.

Sotomayor's speech is in many ways a distillation of the most extreme views of the liberal civil rights establishment. They have dispensed with Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of a "colorblind" society, in which people "will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." The notion of a shared American tradition is considered a dodge for maintaining white, male domination of society. Instead, they aim to secure the levers of power, to empower disadvantaged groups to pursue their distinct ideology, culture, and language. It is not enough to eliminate barriers to entry in business, universities, government, or the bench; numerical quotas are essential to securing each group's "fair share." And most critically, group identity and goals supplant individual identity and professional obligations. Each of these elements, the core of the most extreme variety of contemporary multiculturalism, is prominently featured in Sotomayor's speech and law review article.

Sotomayor begins with a homage to her ethnic background and personal experiences—and indeed pronounces the topic of her speech to be "my Latina identity, where it came from, and the influence I perceive it

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has on my presence on the bench." She goes on to describe in some depth her favorite ethnic foods and her memories of extended family celebrations. She never explains what "Latina" identity means much beyond "I became a Latina by the way I love and the way I live my life." How that might translate into a set of values, intellectual precepts, or methodologies for judging remains unexplained. The description of her ethnic identity is notable in its lack of intellectual content.

But she then gets to the heart of the matter: Whatever it means to be a Latina, the critical issue is that there aren't enough Latinas (or Latinos) on the bench. The bean-counting then begins, a long parade of statistics meant to illustrate her central point: "Those numbers [of Latino judges] are grossly below our proportion of the population." No consideration is given to whether Latinos have obtained the requisite educational or professional achievements or qualifications to qualify for federal judgeships; the key point is the percentage of the pie that they have secured. And the implication is clear: There is something very wrong, nefarious in fact, when a minority group's percentage in the population and its share of seats on the bench don't match up.

Judge Sonia Sotomayor

The reason for that fixation on numbers becomes apparent in the next section of her speech, which is devoted to debunking the views of a former colleague Judge Miriam Cedarbaum:

> Now Judge Cedarbaum expresses concern with any analysis of women and presumably again people of color on the bench, which begins and presumably ends with the conclusion that women or minorities are different from men generally. She sees danger in presuming that judging should be gender or anything else based. She rightly points out that the perception of the differences between men and women is what led to many paternalistic laws and to the denial to women of the right to vote because we were described then "as not capable of reasoning or thinking logically" but instead of "acting intuitively." I am quoting adjectives that were bandied around famously during the suffragettes' movement.

Cedarbaum's view—an affirmation of the innate intellectual equality of her fellow citizens—is what Sotomayor proceeds to dispute at great length. Sotomayor derides the idea that we should be wary of stereotyping individuals' intellectual abilities by their ethnic or racial background or gender. She argues the precise opposite, that intellectual equality is a myth and impartiality a canard:

> While recognizing the potential effect of individual experiences on perception, Judge Cedarbaum nevertheless believes that judges must transcend their personal sympathies and prejudices and aspire to achieve a greater degree of fairness and integrity based on the reason of law. Although I agree with and attempt to work toward Judge Cedarbaum's aspiration, I wonder whether achieving that goal is possible in all or even in most cases. And I wonder whether by ignoring our differences as women or men of color we do a disservice both to the law and society. Whatever the reasons why we may have different perspectives, either as some theorists suggest because of our cultural experiences or as others postulate because we have basic differences in logic and reasoning, are in many respects a small part of a larger practical question we as women and minority judges in society in general must address. I accept the thesis of a law school classmate, Professor Stephen Carter of Yale Law School, in his affirmative action book that in any group of human beings there is a diversity of opinion because there is both a diversity of experiences and of thought. . . . Professor Judith Resnik says that there is not a single voice of feminism, not a feminist approach but many who are exploring the possible ways of being that are distinct from those structured in a world dominated by the power and words of men. Thus, feminist theories of judging are in the midst of creation and are not and perhaps will never aspire to be as solidified as the established legal doctrines of judging can sometimes appear to be.
>
> That same point can be made with respect to people of color. No one person, judge or nominee will speak in a female or people of color voice. I need not remind you that Justice Clarence Thomas represents a part but not the whole of African-American thought on many subjects. Yet, because I accept the proposition that, as Judge Resnik describes it, "to judge is an exercise of power" and because as, another former law school classmate, Professor Martha Minnow of Harvard Law School, states "there is no objective stance but only a series of perspectives—no neutrality, no escape from choice in judging," I further accept that our experiences as women and people of color affect our decisions. The aspiration to impartiality is just that—it's an aspiration because it denies the fact that we are by our experiences making different choices than others. Not all women or people of color, in all or some circumstances or indeed in any particular case or circumstance but enough people of color in enough cases, will make a difference in the process of judging. The Minnesota Supreme Court has given an example of this. As reported by Judge Patricia Wald formerly of the D.C. Circuit Court, three women on the Minnesota Court with two men dissenting agreed to grant a protective order against a father's visitation rights when the father abused his child. The Judicature Journal has at least two excellent studies on how women on the courts of appeal and state supreme courts have tended to vote more often than their male counterpart to uphold women's claims in sex discrimination cases and criminal defendants' claims in search and seizure cases. As recognized by legal scholars, whatever the reason, not one woman or person of color in any one position but as a group we will have an effect on the development of the law and on judging.

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Sotomayor plainly rejects the premise that judges from different backgrounds could or even should put their biases aside. The notion that there is a "Latino" brand of jurisprudence or way of judging seems inherent in her analysis. Minority judges *are* different, she contends, and will judge differently *because* they are Latino or African American or female. Such judges, she is arguing, are products of their ethnic and racial backgrounds and destined to express this on the bench.

In her view minority judges are practicing their own brand of law, which explains why she wants lots of those judges. It is, as she argues in invoking Resnik, about power and about asserting judges' distinct Latina (or female or African-American or whatever) visions.

She also denigrates the notion of a neutral, objective judiciary which treats all citizens alike and removes personal bias from the judicial branch. The goal here is not to remove racial or ethnic bias from judging, but to make sure the right bias is given voice—secured by increased numbers of minority judges. And her qualms about intellectual rigor and impartiality extend to virtually all that judges do ("I wonder whether achieving that goal is possible in *all or even in most cases*"). This is legal relativism, if not nihilism. No objective truth, no objective judging, only power politics.

And then she goes on to dispute the obvious rejoinder to her argument: "Judge Cedarbaum has pointed out to me that seminal decisions in race and sex discrimination cases have come from Supreme Courts composed exclusively of white males." Well, if *that* is the case then the assertion that we must have judges of a certain ethnic or racial background to achieve "good" results is undermined. Really, could it be that any white, liberal male judge might reach the same results as Sotomayor?

It is in this context that her 32 words (and several dozen more) are deployed—to defend the view that ethnicity and gender matter in judging:

> Whether born from experience or inherent physiological or cultural differences, a possibility I abhor less or discount less than my colleague Judge Cedarbaum, our gender and national origins may and will make a difference in our judging. Justice [Sandra Day] O'Connor has often been cited as saying that a wise old man and wise old woman will reach the same conclusion in deciding cases. I am not so sure Justice O'Connor is the author of that line since Professor Resnik attributes that line to Supreme Court Justice Coyle. I am also not so sure that I agree with the statement. First, as Professor Martha Minnow has noted, there can never be a universal definition of wise. Second, I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived that life.

Her "wise Latina" declaration is therefore central to her argument that more Latinas are needed, that their brand of judging is distinct, and that they should wield their Latina wisdom to derive results which are superior to those of white males. It is hardly a throwaway line; it is the essence of her address.

She grudgingly acknowledges that yes, well, there were some noteworthy white jurists whose rulings dismantled legal discrimination. But that required "great moments of enlightenment" on their part, and hence does not diminish the need for the distinctive jurisprudence of nonwhite males:

> However, to understand takes time and effort, something that not all people are willing to give. For others, their experiences limit their ability to understand the experiences of others. Others simply do not care. Hence, one must accept the proposition that a difference there will be by the presence of women and people of color on the bench. Personal experiences affect the facts that judges choose to see. My hope is that I will take the good from my experiences and extrapolate them further into areas with which I am unfamiliar. I simply do not know exactly what that difference will be in my judging. But I accept there will be some based on my gender and my Latina heritage.
>
> I also hope that by raising the question today of what difference having more Latinos and Latinas on the bench will make will start your own evaluation. For people of color and women lawyers, what does and should being an ethnic minority mean in your lawyering? For men lawyers, what areas in your experiences and attitudes do you need to work on to make you capable of reaching those great moments of enlightenment which other men in different circumstances have been able to reach. For all of us, how do [we] change the facts that in every task force study of gender and race bias in the courts, women and people of color, lawyers and judges alike, report in significantly higher percentages than white men that their gender and race has shaped their careers, from hiring, retention to promotion and that a statistically significant number of women and minority lawyers and judges, both alike, have experienced bias in the courtroom?

She concedes that there is a "danger in relative morality" (perhaps she means subjective or bias-laden judging), but quickly returns to her theme: We need to boost minority numbers to change the law from white, male-dominated law into something better:

> All of us in this room must continue individually and in voices united in organizations that have supported this conference, to think about these questions and to figure out how we go about creating the opportunity for there to be more women and people of color on the bench so we can finally have statistically significant numbers to measure the differences we will and are making.

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Sotomayor's speech/law review article is a repudiation of the notion that the rule of law provides a single standard of justice, impartially applied by judges (of whatever background) who put aside bias and favoritism. She isn't advocating some new intellectual approach to interpreting the Constitution. She is, much in the way bilingual advocates defend distinct language traditions, defending a separatist school of judging. The law will be altered not by argument or persuasion, but by sheer force of numbers, by more judges who bring ethnic and gender and racial baggage to the bench.

The president's innocuous spin on Sotomayor's speech is in fact a description of what another Latino jurist offered in *contrast* to Sotomayor. While not styling his comments as a rebuttal to Sotomayor, Judge Richard Paez of the Ninth Circuit spoke in the same venue the following day and did in effect rebut Sotomayor's views. (His remarks, like hers, were published the following year in the *Berkeley La Raza Law Journal*.)

Paez also declared that he would like more Latinos on the bench. Plainly this is a man who is proud of his heritage and would like more Latinos to rise to prominent positions. But his is the commonplace sort of ethnic pride that has permeated much American history. His purpose, as he explains, is *not* to insure some Latino brand of justice:

> [T]here is something about our own personal life experience that makes each of us different. I used to tell jurors when they entered the courtroom and took their oaths as jurors, "You walk into the courtroom with a lifetime of experiences, and we don't ask you to suddenly forget all that experience, to ignore that experience." I asked them if they could judge fairly the case that they were about to hear. I explained, "As jurors, recognize that you might have some bias, or prejudice. Recognize that it exists, and determine whether you can control it so that you can judge the case fairly. Because if you cannot—if you cannot set aside those prejudices, biases and passions—then you should not sit on the case."
>
> The same principle applies to judges. We take an oath of office. At the federal level, it is a very interesting oath. It says, in part, that you promise or swear to do justice to both the poor and the rich. The first time I heard this oath, I was startled by its significance. I have my oath hanging on the wall in my office to remind me of my obligations. And so, although I am a Latino judge and there is no question about that—I am viewed as a Latino judge—as I judge cases, I try to judge them fairly. I try to remain faithful to my oath.

He then goes on to speak of his professional experiences. Paez explains that the experience of providing legal services to poor clients gave him firsthand experience in dealing with the indigent. But then he hastens to add:

> You don't shed that experience—you don't leave it behind. But, when called upon to decide a case, judges have a distinct and clear obligation to apply the law fairly and justly to the parties in the case. Judges have an obligation to read cases honestly and find facts fairly. I strive to do that at all times.

So it is Paez, not Sotomayor, who is the judge Obama describes: one whose "life experiences will give [him] information about the struggles and hardships that people are going through that will make [him] a good judge." Paez offers, in contrast to Sotomayor's celebration of ethnicity, an affirmation of the principle of equal justice. Though his experiences are distinct, his role on the bench is to judge fairly and impartially for all his fellow citizens. This is *not* Sotomayor's vision.

Sotomayor's 32 words were not an off-the-cuff indiscretion, but an accurate summary of 4,000 words of disdain for judicial impartiality. It is also remarkable in its apparent rejection of an assimilative society in which Americans of all backgrounds can receive an unbiased brand of justice that does not vary from court to court because of the race or ethnicity of the judge. It is a vision that subsumes individual identity and professional obligations to the ties that bind one to race and ethnicity.

In Sotomayor's 2001 speech, we have a candid and comprehensive description of her views on multiculturalism and on judging. We must as a matter of intellectual fairness assume that she was sincere. And we can therefore expect to see her put these views into practice should she be confirmed as a Supreme Court justice.

Unlike an appellate court judge who is bound by Supreme Court precedent and who frankly may be drafting opinions with an eye toward ascending to the High Court, a Supreme Court justice is relatively free from constraint. Her lifetime appointment gives her the mandate to write what she pleases, to endeavor to steer the Court and the body of constitutional law in whatever direction she thinks best, and to set a tone and standard of jurisprudence for the lower courts. One can expect that just as Justice Antonin Scalia has demonstrated the majesty of originalist interpretation (in *District of Columbia* v. *Heller*, for example) and extolled the correctness of text-based judging, so too can Sotomayor be expected to use her position if confirmed to implement and popularize her views.

We have never had a Supreme Court justice who subscribed to views like those described in Sotomayor's Berkeley speech and law review article. It will be up to the Senate to decide whether they are compatible with our constitutional tradition and the judicial role. ♦

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There Is No 'Paradox of Thrift'

Neither a borrower nor a spender be

By David Blankenhorn

Frightened by tough economic times, formerly spendthrift Americans are beginning to save. But the shift is causing alarm among some economists and commentators. Prudent savers, say these writers, are exemplars of the "paradox of thrift," which holds that the practice of thrift, while seemingly wise and rational for the individual, can be harmful for society.

So it is that a *Wall Street Journal* headline warned: "Hard-Hit Families Finally Start Saving, Aggravating Nation's Economic Woes." A story in the *New York Times* said the "re-emergence of thrift as a value" presents a serious problem: "Economists call it the Paradox of Thrift." Another *Times* piece cautioned: "Putting away money and paying down debt may be good for one family's kitchen-table economics, but the broader economy suffers in the short term when millions of families do it." Nobel Prize- winning economist and syndicated *Times* columnist Paul Krugman regularly beats this drum. And a recent *Newsweek* cover, evoking World War II recruitment posters, featured a stern-looking Uncle Sam pointing at the reader with the patriotic appeal: "I Want YOU to Start Spending!"

In the 20th century, the paradox of thrift found its greatest champion in John Maynard Keynes. In his *Treatise on Money* (1930), Keynes argued that "mere abstinence is not enough by itself to build cities or drain fens." It is enterprise that builds. "If Enterprise is afoot," he explained, "wealth accumulates whatever may be happening to Thrift; and if Enterprise is asleep, wealth decays whatever Thrift may be doing. Thus, Thrift may be the handmaiden of Enterprise. But equally she may not. And, perhaps, even usually she is not."

In 1931, in a radio address to the British people on how to fight back against the oncoming Great Depression, Keynes was more vehement about the futility of saving and the wisdom of spending. Sometimes, he said, saving one's money was "quite right," but at other times, including the present one, saving was "utterly harmful and misguided." He bluntly warned his fellow citizens: "The best guess I can make is whenever you save five shillings, you put a man out of work for a day." He concluded with an Uncle Sam-like appeal to patriotism:

> Therefore, O patriotic housewives, sally out tomorrow early into the streets and go to the wonderful sales which are everywhere advertised. You will do yourselves good . . . [and you will] have the added joy that you are increasing employment, adding to the wealth of the country because you are setting on foot useful activities, bringing a chance and a hope to Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Belfast.

When writing for policymakers and economists, Keynes and his followers spelled out this idea in more formal terms. They posited that whenever a nation's desire to save exceeds productive investment, the result is a savings glut. The excess savings, because they are not smoothly turned into investments, are effectively quarantined from normal economic life, much as if the savers had hidden their money under the floorboards. This phenomenon in turn can help trigger a downward economic spiral, a sort of negative feedback loop in which reduced consumer spending causes greater unemployment, and greater unemployment reduces spending, and so on. In the end, everyone—including the well-meaning chap who saved his five shillings in the first place—comes out poorer.

Finally, periods of economic downturn, when people's natural concern for the future may cause them to try to save more, are precisely the periods in which savings gluts can do the most damage to society, by deepening rather than counteracting the downward turn in the business cycle.

Ever since Keynes, the proposition that thrift can be paradoxical has been widely accepted. It made its way into the best-known economics textbook of the second half of the 20th century, *Economics* by Paul A. Samuelson and (in later editions) William Nordhaus. Not only does it continue to influence each generation of policymakers and commenta-

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tors, but among the general public, the notion is widespread that, in order to keep the economy growing, citizens have a duty, whatever else may happen, to keep on spending.

But is it true? Is there actually something paradoxical about thrift that can make it more a curse than a blessing for society? Here, in ascending level of importance, are five reasons why, in fact, there is no paradox of thrift.

5 *Saved money is likely to be productive money.*

It is actually possible to save too much. Anyone who is denying his children adequate food or medicine or endangering his own health in order to allocate more to savings is almost certainly saving too much.

As a group, however, Americans have never been at serious risk of oversaving. Over the past eight decades, the personal savings rate in the United States—the difference between earnings and expenditures—averaged about 7 percent. It reached about 11 percent in the early 1980s and then began a long, steep decline. By the time the nation entered the 21st century overleveraged and in debt, the personal savings rate had sunk to zero or below.

In recent months, as the economic horizon has rapidly darkened, the U.S. personal savings rate has soared. Last week the Commerce Department reported it at 5.7 percent, according to the Associated Press. By the end of the year, according to some economists, it may reach 7 or 8 percent. In other words, if they are right, by 2010 Americans may be saving at about the same rate that we've averaged since 1930.

No one would call this dangerous oversaving. On the contrary, even the current modest increase in the savings rate is good for families and the nation. The reason is simple: Savings—money diverted from consumption—are the only source of money for productive investment, and productive investment is the lifeblood of the economy.

By the same token, economists overwhelmingly agree that a high-debt, zero-saving society is one that has put itself at long-term risk. For a time, it may be possible to live the high life on borrowed money. Having other nations largely finance our ever-growing debts may allow us to kick the can down the road while continuing to shop as if there were no tomorrow.

Americans who are now taking steps to get their financial house in order are not the problem for a troubled economy. They are the solution.

But it's ultimately unsustainable. Over time, a thriving economy and a successful society require citizens who are willing and able to save for the future, and this fundamental fact will not change.

The "savings glut" described by Keynes and others, when the desire to save overwhelms our willingness to invest, may be a theoretical danger, but the weight of evidence suggests that it is not happening today in the United States.

The banking and finance crisis of recent months—which may already be easing—appears at least to some degree to have unnaturally frozen the flow of credit. And there appears to be a hesitancy among many investors. But no one is seriously suggesting that this problem could be solved by returning to the practice of shopping with money we don't have. After all, if that were the solution, there would never have been a crisis in the first place.

According to most analysts, the root of our financial crisis is enormously large, interlocking, and ultimately toxic structures of debt. And if piled-up consumer debt is part of the problem, running up still more consumer debt can hardly be the solution.

In fact, the solution lies in the opposite direction. An 8 or 9 percent personal savings rate in 2010, allowing households to reduce their debt and begin to live within their means, might actually ameliorate the banking crisis, insofar as it would once again position millions of Americans to become investors and wealth-builders over the long run.

More broadly, if we bracket for a moment the immediate and probably short-term failures in our banking system and take a longer view, the danger of a genuine American savings glut—savings in excess of productive investment—appears to be all but nonexistent.

Fundamentally, our economy is wide open and extremely dynamic. We value, and frequently reward, risk-taking and entrepreneurialism. Stand on any American Main Street and you can hardly throw a brick without hitting someone who is itching to start a business, make a new product, try out an idea, risk all to follow a dream. People around the world admire us (and occasionally despise us), and some of them end up coming here, for precisely these reasons. It is unlikely, under any reasonably foreseeable circumstances, that this deep-rooted

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American characteristic will disappear, or turn into its opposite, such that we suddenly have too many saved dollars chasing too few new challenges and new ideas. In America, saved money typically is productive money.

4 *For individuals and families, it's always wise to live within your means.*

Consider a 27-year-old woman from Missouri, a graduate of a community college, working as a sales representative for a big greeting card company. She is recently married. Her husband also works in corporate sales. Their annual income is $84,000. They have no children, but hope to start a family soon. And owning a home is one of their dreams.

They eat out a lot. They enjoy travel. Between them, they have five credit cards, with a balance of about $11,500. (A year ago, the unpaid balance was $9,000.) Some months, they try to pay down some of the principal, but for most of the past year, they paid only the minimum. Also, the husband still owes about $16,000 on his student loans. Sometimes, when an unexpected expense arises, his wife borrows money from her parents. Usually she pays them back, but not always. Together, the couple have about $700 in the bank.

Plainly, these two are spending too much. They have good jobs, a reasonable income, and no children, yet they are spending nearly every penny they have on short-term consumption, while slipping further into debt. If this pattern is projected even a few years into the future, they are almost surely looking at a painful financial crisis.

Then suppose the economy turns sour. Their companies are laying off workers and cutting back. The couple both still have their jobs, but they're worried.

As a result, they begin to make changes. The nice vacation they were planning—with the expenses to go on their credit cards—is now on hold. They try to eat out less, to cut back on entertainment, to be more careful with their dollars generally. They are being more responsible—but are they hurting their society by helping themselves in this way? Are they failing to consider, in the economic sphere, their patriotic duty?

It's hard to see how that could be the case. Indeed, most young couples are likely to feel much better about their chances of building a nest if they first build a nest egg. Once people begin to live within their means, moreover, all kinds of productive and pro-social things are likely to happen.

First and foremost, they become richer. That is the purpose of thrift. Not coincidentally, the most beloved and frequently quoted book on thrift in the history of the world, written by Benjamin Franklin, is entitled *The Way to Wealth*. It's almost a mathematical certainty that if people practice thrift over time—and avoid getting struck by lightning or run over by a truck—they will get richer. In all likelihood, they will get significantly richer.

Second, such savers are actually likely to spend more than people mired in debt. Couples who practice thrift and build wealth over time have more assets and savings, which in turn become productive investments, which in turn promote economic growth and development. Such thrifty couples also tend to pay more taxes. This whole dynamic is good for families and for their society. In fact, if the goal is more stimulative spending, thrift is the main way to get there.

So Americans who are now taking steps to get their financial house in order are not the problem for a troubled economy. They are the solution. No one should chastise them on the grounds that society paradoxically benefits from their overindebtedness. On the contrary, everyone should cheer their newfound thrift and hope that living within one's means becomes prevalent.

3 *Governments, not individuals or families, are responsible for any deficit spending needed to moderate economic downturns.*

It is true that a sudden drop in consumer spending—that is, in the demand for goods and services—can lead to unemployment, worsening an economic downturn. And in this situation, wise policymakers may wish to engage in deficit spending in order to stimulate demand, boost employment, and generally moderate the effects of the downturn. But this isn't a paradox.

Neoclassical economic theory has long taught that, in a downturn, government may properly engage in deficit spending, just as, in boom years, a wise government builds up a surplus. Keynes himself contributed to this idea. One happy result of this economic model is a balanced budget over the course of the business cycle. Another is a moderating of highs and lows. Just as calculated doses of fiscal restraint help keep the economy from overheating during upturns, so calculated doses of fiscal excess help moderate the effects and duration of downturns.

One can only wish that the Bush administration had respected these norms, instead of blithely running huge budget deficits throughout the recent go-go years. And one can only pray that now, as we confront the worst economic downturn in decades, the far larger deficits planned by the Obama administration are the right amount of federal deficit spending.

But whatever else may be true of deficit spending during downturns, the job must necessarily fall to governments. It makes no sense, from either the individual's or the society's point of view, to urge already over-indebted citizens

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and families to do anything other than start living within their means, so as to begin building wealth, instead of only consuming and borrowing.

Furthermore, it is far more efficient for the government to borrow than the individual. The U.S. government can borrow money to cover its deficit spending at an interest rate of 2 or 3 percent—a fraction of the 20 percent or more that families pay on credit card debt.

Then, there is what the economist Mancur Olson called the logic of collective action. There are some goals which, even when favored by all as individuals, cannot be achieved through individual action. For example, if one shopkeeper in a big, dirty city stops throwing his garbage into the street, he can have only a slight impact on the overall problem. And if he pays for private garbage removal, his costs will go up while his neighbors' costs remain constant, a development that could ultimately threaten his livelihood. The only real solution is for all the shopkeepers at once to change their behavior. There are many other illustrations of the logic of collective action, and deficit spending to stimulate the economy is one of them.

If, in the spirit of Keynes's famous appeal, a patriotic housewife sallies forth to serve her country by maxing out another credit card, she is like the shopkeeper. Her splurge will hardly affect total consumer spending, though it will make her and her family worse off. Which is why today's patriotic but intelligent housewife will instead sally over to a savings bank or credit union and make a deposit—an action that will almost certainly make her and her family better off and, by helping her move from dependent debtor to independent saver and investor, be good for society.

For these reasons, priming the economic pump in the short term must be done collectively, through the actions of government, instead of individually, through the private overspending of citizens and households. This concept is completely consistent with the thrift ethic, and there is nothing paradoxical about it.

2 *Assuming that there is a paradox of thrift encourages waste.*

The story is told that Keynes, in a fancy washroom at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington in 1934, instead of taking a single towel to dry his hands, dramatically pushed the entire pile of clean towels to the floor and crumpled them, explaining to his listeners that this way of using towels would do more to reduce unemployment and stimulate the economy than using a single towel.

The story may be apocryphal, but it captures the essence of the alleged paradox of thrift. In this view, it is "Enterprise" that generates wealth—regardless, as Keynes put it, of "whatever may be happening to Thrift." Accordingly, if tossing clean towels onto a dirty floor will generate a bit more "Enterprise" among underemployed hotel workers, then by all means start tossing, and thrift be damned, since it is inactivity that constitutes the ultimate danger. The values traditionally associated with thrift—carefulness, conservation—become a sideshow at best and do harm at worst.

At the center of this argument is the unethical and finally counterproductive encouragement of waste. A great weakness not only of the critique of thrift, but also of much economic analysis, is the dubious claim that every dollar spent on economic "Enterprise" is the equivalent of every other dollar spent on it.

But there is no such equivalence. A dollar spent on bottled water is clearly not as good—not as productive, as wise, as helpful to society—as a dollar spent on a tap water purifier. A dollar spent on a lottery ticket is not as good as a dollar spent on a DVD. A dollar spent on junk food is not as good as a dollar spent on healthy food. And, no, a dollar spent on cleaning needlessly dirtied hotel towels is not as good as a dollar spent on, say, improving service in the hotel restaurant.

This fundamental misconception—the idea that buying stuff is buying stuff is buying stuff, and that all of it is equally valuable to the economy—is harmful wherever it finds expression, but it is particularly harmful in the United States, where we are already dangerously in thrall to the idea that vast amounts of consumption are necessary and good.

Especially in the United States, we need to make more, and better, distinctions about how we spend our money. We are arguably the most wasteful society on the planet. On the one hand, many of us buy amazing amounts of stuff we don't need and that fails to enrich our lives. On the other hand, there are numerous domains of American life—transportation, health care, education, leisure time, and others—that cry out for more, and more prudent, expenditures.

1 *Properly understood, "thrift" means the ethic and practice of wise use.*

If Keynes had merely insisted that there is a "paradox of *saving*," that would have been an interesting proposition. But Keynes chose to call it a paradox of *thrift*. That is a provocation, for "thrift" is a larger and more culturally consequential idea than "saving."

Keynes apparently didn't know this. In *A Treatise on Money*, he criticized "that voluntary abstinence of individuals from the immediate enjoyment of consumption, which we call Thrift." And then, remember, he insisted "it should be obvious that mere abstinence is not enough by itself to build cities or drain fens."

For Keynes, and countless others who have admired and followed him, thrift is abstinence, plain and simple. It's a wholly negative concept—it means not doing something

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(not enjoying the goods of consumption). It connotes passivity, quietude, voluntary withdrawal. That's why Keynes could contrast "Thrift," which for him means inactivity, with "Enterprise," which for him means activity.

But the root of "thrift" is "thrive," and a thrifty person is one who thrives.

Thrift connotes growing, flourishing, spreading out. A commonly repeated maxim from thrift's heyday as an American public value is that thrift makes two blades of grass grow where only one grew before. There are plants that are commonly called "thrift." The celebrated 1911 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*—the very edition that Keynes would have used in the 1920s—thus explains that "there are several species of plants, such as the sea-pink, *Armeria maritima*, or March rosemary (*Statice*) which from their vigorous growth are often termed 'thrift.'"

Thrift connotes industry, hard work, prosperity. The goal of thrift is to gain and enjoy the good things of life. Says the 16th-century poet John Lyly: "Thy heart's thirst is satisfied with thy hand's thrift." The great apostle of thrift Benjamin Franklin says: "Be industrious and frugal, and you will be rich." When Franklin similarly advises that "Industry need not wish," he is offering a strategy for getting one's wishes: Be industrious. That strategy, he tells us, "consists very much in Thrift." Franklin openly states that "wealth is not his that has it, but his that enjoys it."

Thrift connotes abundance. Thrifty people, as we've seen, tend to earn and spend much more than thriftless people. Says the 16th-century poet and courtier Sir Philip Sidney: "Thrift is the fuel of magnificence."

The thrift ethic is a secular expression of the religious principle of stewardship. The main idea is that we are not the owners of our wealth, but rather the trustees, who are therefore ethically obligated to use our wealth wisely and carefully, for our benefit and for the benefit of others. The Puritan divine Cotton Mather, who strongly influenced Franklin, writes in *Essays to Do Good*, published in 1710: "This may be said of all our estates: what God gives us, is not given for ourselves, but, 'for the Lord.'" A quarter-century later, Franklin, in *Poor Richard's Almanac*, omits the theology and puts it this way: "The noblest question in the world is What good may I do in it?"

Thrift connotes saving, carefulness in spending, sustainability, and conservation. While such capacities do not define thrift, they are integral to the larger concept of wise use. Careful spending, for example, as we learn from several old writers, is "the handmaiden of generosity." Franklin constantly emphasizes the importance of frugality. For many decades during the 20th century, U.S. and British mutual savings banks gave away to their depositors small metal "Thrift Banks" (to save coins in) and pamphlet-style "Books of Thrift" (full of tips for Mom and Dad about household budgeting). A character called "Uncle Thrift," the star of an American children's book published in 1923, raps: *We will be a thrifty nation, / When we all learn conservation*.

DAVID BLANKENHORN

Thrift connotes industry, hard work, prosperity. Its goal is to gain and enjoy the good things of life. Says the 16th-century poet John Lyly: "Thy heart's thirst is satisfied with thy hand's thrift."

Put the pieces together, and the concept of thrift turns out to be a sophisticated call for the ethics and practice of wise use. Thrift is the art of making the wisest use of all that we have—time, money, possessions, our health, and our society's natural resources—to promote both our own flourishing and the social good. The concepts most contrary to thrift are idleness and waste.

As the countless American and British advocates of thrift over the past several centuries knew, the notions of "mere abstinence" and "inactivity" can't remotely sum up the thrift ethic. When it comes to understanding what thrift is, Keynes and company are not even close. Indeed, it is only by misconceiving thrift that they have been able to foist a pernicious concept on the public mind.

To most people, the phrase "paradox of thrift" means that thrift can be a bad thing. The very existence of the phrase invites us to believe that personal restraint can be harmful and personal irresponsibility can be socially beneficial, that wastefulness is not so bad after all, and that what appears to be wise for me and my family can actually hurt society. It is past time to jettison such bankrupt thoughts and put the "paradox of thrift" out of its misery once and for all. ♦

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'Poet Laureate of Atoms'

To appreciate Nature, understand Lucretius

BY JOHN TALBOT

Why bother, in 2009, with Lucretius, the Roman poet-philosopher?

Never a better time than now, in this bicentennial year of Charles Darwin, whose notions of the survival of the fittest were eloquently anticipated by Lucretius in his first century B.C. masterpiece, *The Nature of Things.* The poem, though it is much else besides, is a kind of scientific treatise in verse which seeks to explain the universe in strictly materialist terms. This involves a gripping and zealous account of human evolution, which makes reading Lucretius against Darwin richly illuminating.

The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius
edited by Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie
Cambridge, 382 pp., $34.99

Lucretius: The Nature of Things
translated by A.E. Stallings
Penguin, 336 pp., $15

Darwin himself disavowed having read Lucretius—imagine Milton claiming never to have read Genesis—but he did know there was a Lucretian thread in his family history. As early as the late 18th century his grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, was elaborating proto-evolutionary theories in the form of epic-length poems echoing the style and substance of *The Nature of Things.* So Charles Darwin both inherited and extended a major portion of the Lucretian heritage, and the great naturalist's anniversary is a fitting occasion for readers to return to Lucretius himself.

And we can look forward to another Lucretian moment this year, provided the custodians of the Hadron Collider manage to work out the glitches in that prodigious engine which last year briefly drew the world's attention down to the scale of atoms. For Lucretius is the poet laureate of atoms. The secret of the universe—he is charmingly gushy about this—is that everything is constructed of atoms (and the open spaces between them), and the infinite variety of the universe can be put down to the endless combinations and recombinations of those indivisible particles.

In a vivid passage he likens colliding atoms to warriors "in everlasting struggle, battling in troops, / ceaselessly separating and regathering in groups." Homer's epic warriors are reimagined into the sphere of atomic collision, as if Achilles and Hector were poor ephemeral echoes of those eternal, cosmic jousters. Modern and ancient atomic theory are far from identical or even continuous, but Isaac Newton in his scientific papers quoted Lucretius, and Albert Einstein wrote with guarded admiration of the Roman poet's scientific foresight. In any case, when they throw the switch in Geneva, and if the atoms collide without bring-

Titus Lucretius Carus, ca. 55 B.C.

SPENCER ARNOLD / GETTY IMAGES

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ing an end to life on earth, you could do far worse than to celebrate your reprieve from annihilation by turning to Lucretius' passages on atoms.

Evolution, atomic theory—none of this may sound like the stuff of gripping poetry. But in Lucretius' hands the topics are compelling. Partly it's to do with the charisma of his voice: He addresses you with the rhythmic evangelical ardor of a sermon, as aurally intricate as John Donne and as fervent as Jonathan Edwards, but in the service of a vision which, in its cosmic sweep, comes closer to William Blake, who saw the universe in a grain of sand.

But Blake repudiated Lucretius, because the Roman poet's gospel is that, since the universe can be explained in materialist terms, we mortals should cease to worry about divine rewards and retribution and cultivate, instead, the supreme mental tranquility—*ataraxia*—advocated by his hero, the philosopher Epicurus. And he wants to convert you to Epicureanism.

Yet the poem rarely lapses into the aridity of a science textbook or the pestering of a missionary tract, because it is everywhere enlivened by illustrations and asides which touch on all dimensions of everyday life: the way children spin about to make themselves dizzy, the ambiguity of the colors on a pigeon's neck, the split-second of hesitation when the gates open at the beginning of a horse race. Along with those homely observations there are passages of awful majesty.

The poem opens with one: a sublime invocation of Venus as embodying the generative energy that brings life in all its teeming variety into being. Later comes a description of a thunderstorm as menacing as the one that blows through *King Lear.* The poem ends with an unforgettable account of a plague that harrows Athens. Lucretius spells out the pathology of the disease—the burning eyes, the oozing sores—with forensic detail.

This is ostensibly meant to illustrate his notions about the material (rather than supernatural) causes of disease; but the account of man's helplessness before the advancing plague achieves something more, underscoring the poem's larger cosmic vision of nature's indifference to man. The English poet C.H. Sisson got it right, locating the power of *The Nature of Things* not in the Epicurean theory the poet uses as scaffolding, but in Lucretius' "vision of something more terrible than the theory."

Lucretius suits, too, the cultural moment which has given us a recent spate of bestselling atheist tracts: *The Nature of Things* deserves a place among the bookstore ziggurats of *The God Delusion* and *God Is Not Great*. This is because Lucretius, if he is not strictly an atheist, burns with Epicurean zeal to persuade us that gods do not fuss with mortals, and so we humans can cast off the shackles of religious superstition.

So Lucretius has been a hot potato in the Christian West, championed by atheists, deplored by the pious, and variously troubling and stimulating to those who fall somewhere in between. Among Christians he has found many admirers: Milton and Alexander Pope drew on his poetic energies while correcting his heresies; C.S. Lewis found *The Nature of Things* as rewarding a poem after his conversion to Christianity as it had been for him as a young atheist.

Believers such as myself, who must reject Lucretius' doctrine of divine indifference, can nevertheless admire the force of his poetry; but I would think even unbelievers would pass with relief from the shrillness and reductivism of the professional atheists to the more sublime, more humane, Lucretius.

Lucretius is, then, at this moment not only timeless but also topical. So the appearance of two new Lucretian books is propitious. The first of these, *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, though it is the work of 20 leading scholars and will be consulted by professional classicists, nevertheless is perfectly accessible to the layman and could serve as a field guide to the general reader seeking to explore Lucretius. In their introduction, the editors Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie offer perhaps the best brief orientation to the subject to be had anywhere. From there the enquiring reader can pass on to any of the first six chapters, focusing on the poem itself, and which together form a superb *vade mecum* to the poetry.

But what makes *The Cambridge Companion* especially attractive to the general reader is the attention it devotes, in the following 13 essays, to Lucretius' fascinating afterlife in Western literature, science, philosophy, and art. To read them in succession is like being treated to an Intellectual History of Everything, since few writers have had so many points of contact as Lucretius with so many thinkers in so many fields.

In a standout chapter, historians of science Monte Johnson and Catherine Wilson trace the impact of Lucretius on Western scientific thought from the Middle Ages to the present. There is intrigue in discovering how scientists and philosophers in a Christian culture managed this tricky project: to "detach the science of atomism from its atheistic and hedonistic associations," or, as one 17th-century thinker put it, how to extract the "pure and rich Metall" that could be found in the sinister pagan's poem.

There's drama, too, in seeing how Lucretius emerges as a "major driving force in the Scientific Revolution." Among the virtues of this chapter is that Johnson and Wilson, for all the evidence they present of Lucretius' impact on science, fend off hyperbole and anachronism by always attending to the differences between ancient and modern materialism, and resist implying false continuity between Lucretius and modern science.

There are stimulating chapters on Lucretius and modern philosophy, including a fascinating account of the role the Roman poet played in the contentious friendship between the radical Voltaire and Frederick the Great of Prussia; on Lucretius' role in the Italian Renaissance (did he inspire Botticelli's *Primavera*?) and on Renaissance English literature, where a special case is made for Edmund Spenser's indebtedness.

That Lucretius was an especially big hit with Enlightenment rationalists (including notably Denis Diderot, David Hume, John Locke, and Immanuel Kant) will come as no surprise, but many of the details that emerge in tracing their debts to him are vivid and memorable. The famous Lisbon earthquake on All Saints' Day

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1755, which killed so many pious Christians in the churches where they were, at that moment, worshipping, provoked contemporary comparisons with Lucretius' chilling account of an earthquake which, he argued, points to the absence of divine providence.

Voltaire, who made the Lisbon disaster the setting of a memorable episode in *Candide*, based his satire in part on Lucretius' "stinging critique of anthropomorphism" of the kind which leads Pangloss to assume that all things in nature are providently designed for human convenience.

What may come as a surprise is how much Lucretius mattered to the Romantics. His importance for them (argues Martin Priestman in the essay on the poet's 19th-century reception) has been underestimated. Lucretius lies behind many of William Wordsworth's poems. Schoolboy Percy Shelley was led to atheism in large part through reading Lucretius, "the best of Latin poets," at Eton.

But Lucretius was an affront to the Christian sensibilities of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Blake's dismissal of Enlightenment rationalism—"Mock on, mock on, Voltaire, Rousseau"—concludes with a swipe at "the atoms of Democritus," which must also count as a swipe at Democritus' exponent, Lucretius.

Lucretius was a major figure in the Victorian controversies surrounding Darwinism, a topic given its due by more than one author here; what also emerges from the imaginations of Victorian poets such as Matthew Arnold and Alfred Tennyson is a portrait of Lucretius as a "depressed, tortured modern" on the one hand, and from other writers, such as Edward Fitzgerald and Walter Pater, as a well-adjusted, "right-minded guide to the good life." Walt Whitman, with some reservation, saw in Lucretius a model for a particularly American kind of poet who would embrace "whatever science indicates."

The very confirmation of atomic theory may have made Lucretius, in some ways, a less vivid presence in the 20th century, but Stuart Gillespie and Donald Mackenzie nevertheless find intriguing links to writers such as Hugh MacDiarmid, Thomas Hardy, A.E. Housman, and Italo Calvino. An apprehension of Lucretius helps to account for the cosmic chilliness throughout much of Robert Frost, who explicitly acknowledged the poet's influence. Lucretius is important to philosophers of the 20th century (George Santayana) and the present (Martha Nussbaum). Primo Levi's scientific career was inspired by Sir William Bragg's 1925 lectures *Concerning the Nature of Things*, which included in its opening lecture a "salute to Lucretius." And on and on. This brief survey of the *Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* cannot do justice to its copiousness. It's a book for relishing.

Right, then—your appetite is whetted, and you're impatient to plunge into the poem itself. Your Latin's rusty (no longer any shame in that), so which translation do you turn to? The new Penguin Lucretius, translated by A.E. Stallings, offers a rewarding way in. I almost wrote "eccentric way in" because the translator has taken the unlikely strategy ("crazy," she concedes in her preface) of rendering the poem in rhymed fourteeners, that gangly, sprawling meter rarely seen since the 16th century, and rarely even then. A snippet—Lucretius on the vanity of prayer—gives you the flavor:

> *Or when a tempest rises up, when winds of gale-force sweep*
> *The seas, take the commander and his fleet out of the deep*
> *With all his mighty legions and his elephants of war—*
> *Does he not pray to the gods for peace, and terrified, implore*
> *The squall to die down, and beseech more favorable winds to blow,*
> *But all in vain, since often violent whirlwinds won't let go. . . .*

Once you surrender to it, the jaunty sweep of the meter and the anticipation of the rhymes can carry you along pleasingly most of the time, and remind you what is sometimes forgotten: that for all its burden to preach Epicurean doctrine, Lucretius' masterpiece really *is* a poem. That's a welcome departure from most recent translations of Lucretius which, like the previous Penguin edition, are done in workmanlike prose, or like the widely used 1964 version of Rolfe Humphries, are rendered into loose pentameters hardly distinguishable from prose.

The translator herself is one of the best young American poets, whose first two volumes of verse, *Archaic Smile* (1999) and *Hapax* (2006), are among the most accomplished and—what is rare in poetry these days—*entertaining* books of the last decade. They stand out for their imaginative handling of rhyme and meter and what you might call a sly intellectual whimsy, by which even Stallings's darker poems glow with a shrewd wit.

I mention Stallings's original poetry because its qualities can be felt in her translation and help to account for the unconventional character of her Lucretius. This involves an intriguing gap between the rhetorical pitch of author and translator. Lucretius in Latin is a craggy affair: His language is rugged, his phrasing abrupt, his tone lofty and often scornful. "Sublime frenzy" is how an ancient admirer put it. Stallings's Lucretius is also energetic, but on a different tonal wavelength: smoother, more genial, wittier, just as in her own poetry Stallings is smoother, more genial, wittier.

At its extreme, the result is twee (*bones are made of itsy-bitsy bones, and what composes / Flesh is teensy globs of flesh*) and occasionally diction and aural effects hint at Lucretian asperity: *The cark and care of mortal men and all their hounding fears.* Most often, though, Stallings steers a middle course. This passage, in which Lucretius famously argues that a spoonful of sugar (poetry) helps the medicine (philosophy) go down, is typical of the pitch of voice through which Stallings's Lucretius addresses us:

> *Consider a physician with a child who will not sip*
> *A disgusting dose of wormwood: first, he coats the goblet's lip*
> *All round with honey's sweet blond stickiness, that way to lure*
> *Gullible youth to taste it, and to drain the bitter cure*
> *The child's duped but not cheated—rather, put back in the pink*
> *That's what I do.*

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That's wonderful writing. Its virtues—the lanky chattiness, the offhand colloquial verve, the wit that pervades it all—belong more to Stallings than Lucretius.

Her translation assimilates other voices as well. In its playfulness it is less like Lucretius than Ovid, the irreverent Roman poet whose masterpiece, *The Metamorphoses*, was itself masterfully translated in the 16th century by Arthur Golding—into rhymed fourteeners. The metrical parallel is very much to the point: Stallings gives us, in its garrulousness and hint of cheekiness, an almost Ovidian Lucretius. (It makes me wonder whether she has detected veins of whimsy in the original which most of us have missed.) Among English poets, the chief analogue is Spenser, who in his *Faerie Queene* echoed the phrasing of the famous opening lines of *The Nature of Things*; Stallings, translating the same passage from Lucretius, echoes the (once again) smoother, more leisurely stylings of Spenser. Much of this ventriloquizing comes off as conscious; more than once she dares to use archaisms such as the Elizabethan "vasty." I understand those moments as knowing winks from a sly author.

All these things make Stallings's Lucretius a treat. I doubt that Lucretius and Stallings make a temperamental match: She herself describes the inception of her project as "a lark" rather than an urgent inner need to connect across the centuries with a kindred spirit. English readers who want the verse translation which comes closest to Lucretius' sublime frenzy will have to turn to the still incomparable, though sadly incomplete, version by John Dryden. Those who want a stricter account of Lucretius' argument, the mere semantic content, will do better to consult a sober prose translation.

But Stallings's version, for its freshness, its allusive resonance, its quirkiness, and its headlong metrical momentum, is a welcome addition to the Lucretian tradition. Readers seeking Lucretius in English should not end with Stallings, but they can very happily begin there. ♦

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Mill of the Gods

He knew that the best people know what's best for you.

BY BARTON SWAIM

For the liberal, using that term in the American sense, political freedom isn't freedom from governmental coercion but freedom from moral and social convention.

It is the obliteration of everything that stands in the way of personal fulfillment, and if that means forcing people to countenance what they abhor, or outlawing practices that are second nature to them—then so be it. That is the notion of freedom entertained by at least a third of American citizens, and the great majority of Europeans. John Stuart Mill did not invent this view, but he did more than any other writer to lodge it in the minds of educated people as the only possible way to understand political freedom.

John Stuart Mill

Everybody knows the story of Mill's precociousness—how, coached by his father, James Mill, he began learning Greek at age three; how he read Hume and Gibbon at four; Xenophon, Lucian, and Plato at eight; Aristotle, Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and Cicero at 12. But the key moment in Mill's early development happened at age 15 when he read Jeremy Bentham for the first time. He fell into a sort of intellectual hallucination.

"The feeling rushed upon me," he recalled in his *Autobiography*, "that all previous moralists were superseded and here indeed was the commencement of a new era in thought. . . . The 'principle of utility'"—the principle that all laws and moral precepts should provide for the greatest happiness of the greatest number—"gave unity to my conception of things. I now had opinions; a creed, a doctrine, a philosophy; . . . a religion."

Within a few years, to his credit, Mill came to see the moral vacuity of Bentham's "principle of utility." But that feeling of superiority encouraged by seductive ideologies marked his outlook permanently. Mill was a god in his own eyes; those of whose ideas he disapproved, barely human. Robert Peel, the great prime minister, was a "third-rate man." Of David Hume he could write that "regard for the truth formed no part of his character." Macaulay—for whom Mill reserved a special hatred—was "an intellectual dwarf." It is entirely appropriate that Mill is known today for calling

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the Conservative party "the stupid party"—or more correctly, "the stupidest party" (the remark appears in a footnote in *Considerations on Representative Government*). He was never able to accept the possibility that opinions differing from his own were anything but the result of imbecility.

Mill is often thought of as a dry, lifelessly rational creature. But although he seems to have been personally a bore, his prose is not dry at all but splendidly incisive and often sizzling with indignation. Nor is he the strictly logical writer one might expect—or prefer. Taken as a whole, his writings contain cogent analysis, inconsistencies, and spectacularly bad arguments in more or less equal measure.

The fact that, for generations, he has been quoted as an authority by both libertarians and socialists is itself an indication that his writings lack the level of congruence one expects in a writer lauded as a great political philosopher. Some of his more remarkable inconsistencies may be excused on the grounds that he changed his mind over time; we all do. In other instances, however, opinions intrinsically opposed to each other could coexist in Mill's mind quite comfortably. In *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), an enormously popular and influential work in his day, he championed free trade and the free exchange of ideas, but also state ownership of property.

His most enduring work, of course, is *On Liberty* (1859). Mill's wife Harriet died just before it was published. Whether the book was as much a collaboration with his wife as Mill claimed, it is difficult to know; but he considered the text sacred and refused to alter or add to it. He should have both altered and added to it: It is a deeply flawed book, as even Mill's most ardent admirers have admitted for one reason or another. He states his argument with clarity and force:

> The object of this essay is to assert one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control. . . . That principle is that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection.

This simple idea—the idea that the only sufficient justification for government to abridge individual freedom is to prevent harm to others—appeals to many people instinctively. The trouble begins the moment you ask the questions, What is "harm"? And who decides? That *On Liberty* has frequently been summoned to support the opinions of both those who favor and those who oppose anti-smoking laws gives one some idea of the argument's essential impracticability.

The first thing to know about *On Liberty* is that it isn't the uncomplicated paean to individuality it's often described as being. Mill writes at length about the need to safeguard the right to "eccentricity," but he wasn't interested in eccentricity among ordinary people. He never argued for any intrinsic or metaphysical right to eccentric thought or behavior; he valued liberty rather because he thought it the state most likely to allow great minds to flourish.

"When the opinions of masses of merely average men are everywhere become or becoming the dominant power," he wrote, "the counterpoise and corrective to that tendency would be the more and more pronounced individuality of those who stand on the higher eminences of thought." Chief among those who stood "on the higher eminences of thought" was, as you might guess, John Stuart Mill. *On Liberty*, really, has very little to do with the liberty of citizens as citizens; rather, it's an argument for the liberty of an intellectual aristocracy to rule everybody else.

One of the book's most alluring arguments is one that foreshadows today's obsession with "diversity" and the hypocrisy so frequently visible in its promotion. The argument is that all beliefs, even beliefs agreed upon by everybody, or almost everybody, benefit from criticism. In fact, says Mill, beliefs in the absence of contrary beliefs are worthless and possibly corrupting:

> However unwillingly a person who has a strong opinion may admit the possibility that his opinion may be false, he ought to be moved by the consideration that, however true it may be, if it is not fully, frequently, and fearlessly discussed, it will be held as a dead dogma, not a living truth.

Indeed, so vital are counterarguments to even the most rock-solid doctrines "that if opponents of all important truths do not exist, it is indispensable to imagine them, and supply them with the strongest arguments which the most skillful devil's advocate can conjure up."

All this may be true at some rarefied altitude. But it means nothing in the real world of human relations. Mill showed no patience with those who questioned what he believed to be obvious and well-established truths. Nor did his opponents. Nor does anyone.

Indeed Mill himself provided the best illustrations of this idea's uselessness. In 1866 he informed James Martineau that he, Mill, would support his rival, George Croom Robertson, for a professorship in logic at University College London. "Though I have no reason to think his claims [i.e. competence] superior to yours in any other respect, [Robertson] would certainly teach doctrines much nearer than yours to those which I myself hold on the great philosophical questions."

Never mind the intrinsic value of dissent and criticism, the supposed merits of clashing opinions: Mill wanted his own man in the job because he liked his views better than those of the other fellow. He seems to have sensed his hypocrisy and attempted to justify himself by claiming that his own views did not have "their fair share of influence in the public teaching of this country." Put another way: Since his own opinions lacked their "fair share of influence" in the public, promoting diversity of opinion and shutting out contrary opinions were one and the same activity.

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So it is always with those who suppose that diversity of belief is, in all circumstances, a good thing, that dissent is always healthy, and that beliefs, no matter how widely assumed to be true, must always be questioned. The trouble with that line of thinking is that it always applies to other people, never to oneself. Its adherents naturally believe their views are in the minority—who doesn't?—and that views they detest are everywhere prevailing. And the only way to uphold their commitment to "diversity" is to impose, within their sphere of influence, a rigid ideological conformity.

The world envisioned in Mill's famous book exists in its purest form on today's university campuses. It's a world in which entire departments are composed of faculty who hold exactly the same views on all important questions, and in which democracy is countenanced only insofar as it affords power to busybodies with postgraduate degrees. And these, of course, are the same citadels of sameness in which young people are censured and ridiculed if they fail to embrace the virtues of "diversity" with sufficient zeal.

Rather a curious legacy for the philosopher of liberty. ♦

Lead Kindly Life

The kindness of strangers, or a strange sort of kindness?

BY EMILY COLETTE WILKINSON

More than 300 years after its publication, Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* and its grim vision of humankind seem still to haunt the Western imagination.

Hobbes insisted that human beings were not naturally kind or sociable, but competitive, cruel, selfish, and suspicious—driven only by the need to gratify private desires, and incapable of social life. The Hobbesian human being did not desire companionship, but feared his fellow creatures as threats to his life, property, and happiness; his life was lived in isolation and in fear of violence. As the oft-repeated lines from *Leviathan* put it, the life of man in the state of nature must be "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short," a perpetual war "of every man, against every man."

On Kindness
by Adam Phillips
and Barbara Taylor
Farrar, Straus and Giroux,
128 pp., $20

Emily Colette Wilkinson is a writer in Pasadena.

Hobbes's portrait of the species is not flattering or comforting, to say the least; and most of the 17th- and 18th-century philosophers of human nature who wrote in his wake repudiated his ideas. The major theorists of the Enlightenment—Hume, Smith, Shaftesbury, Rousseau, and others—insisted that more benevolent qualities like sociability and sympathy were the foundation of human nature and the basis of civilization. But Hobbes's vision endured.

According to the authors of *On Kindness*, a new book that is part theory of human nature and part intellectual history, Hobbes's unattractive portrait of humankind lingers even now in our collective consciousness, asking us to think the worst of ourselves. If we are not the brutal, lonely creatures that Hobbes supposed us, Barbara Taylor and Adam Phillips contend, we still *think* we are: We are still enthralled by Hobbes's misguided yet powerful notion "that we are deeply and fundamentally antagonistic to each other," a conviction that makes us fail to see that "the kind life—the life lived in instinctive sympathetic identification with the vulnerabilities and attractions of others—is the life we are more inclined to live."

Taylor and Phillips argue that, instead of gratifying ourselves and others by embracing the kind life, we are wary of kindness and neurotic about it. We either deify those we identify as kind, or suspect that they are hypocrites and losers:

> Kindness—that is, the ability to bear the vulnerability of others, and therefore of oneself—has become a sign of weakness (except of course among saintly people, in whom it is a sign of their exceptionality). Nonetheless we have become phobic of kindness in our societies, avoiding obvious acts of kindness and producing, as we do with phobias, endless rationalizations to justify our avoidance.

So the openly kind become saints, freaks, and failures, while the rest of us anxiously avoid each other, even as we yearn for the shared pleasures of compassion and connectedness.

While there is a certain ring of truth in the deification/suspicion dyad that Taylor and Phillips offer in their account of general perceptions of public icons of kindness, their case for our being in the midst of a pandemic fear of kindness feels a bit thin.

Who are "the enemies of kindness" they fleetingly mention? And what, exactly, are the manifestations of the "contemporary terror" of kindness? Was there some golden age of human kindness against which contemporary societies fail to measure up? In a rather glib passage toward the end of this very brief book, it seems that perhaps capitalism—"no system for the kindhearted"—might be chief among the shadowy enemies of kindness, but the case is made anecdotally in a breezy few pages.

Here we get several jabs at Tony Blair for such declarations as "the new welfare state must encourage work and not dependency" while

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(Taylor and Phillips tell us vaguely) "a plague of cost-cutting managers chomped away at Britain's social services." All of a sudden, a book that had been a call to the kind life and an intellectual history of theories of personal kindness becomes, for a moment, a flimsy account of the decay of institutional kindness (welfare benefits, social security measures).

A substantial case might be made against capitalism as an enemy of kindness, but it is not made in *On Kindness*. Indeed, in making its slapdash capitalism-killed-kindness argument, this volume becomes that occasionally charming, but always intellectually compromising, Malcolm Gladwellian thing: a cultural critique based on a smattering of anecdotes and selected statistics.

The book's moonlighting as a slipshod cultural critique is symptomatic of a larger identity crisis: Taylor and Phillips seem generally confused (or perhaps at odds as coauthors) about what they meant their book to be, and it feels fractured and unstable throughout. In spite of its brevity, *On Kindness* manages to contain a disorienting hodgepodge of pieces of many books it might have been. The introduction promises that it will explain the epidemic of unkindness in which we now live, what living a kind life means, and why the kind life is the best life. But this is not what the book ultimately does.

What the "kind life" would mean in concrete, day-to-day terms is never explained. Instead, we get breezy forays into what kindness means in terms of government policy, and manifesto-worthy (but vague) condemnations of our era of unkindness, as well as an intellectual history of Western theories of kindness from the Stoics through the 19th century. There is a psychoanalytic account of human nature—including though by no means limited to Freudian ideas about our capacity for kindness—and a final section that adds Darwin, the Transcendentalists, Florence Nightingale, and assorted others as advocates of the "kind life," while identifying most major British and American political leaders of the past several decades as enemies of kindness.

In the midst of this bewildering assemblage, the intellectual history ("A Short History of Kindness") alone is worth reading. It offers a brisk, lucid narrative of the major theories of human nature, beginning with the Stoics. By far the most interesting part of this piece, and *On Kindness* as a whole, is the idea that post-Augustinian Christianity became too focused on man's sinfulness, and that in its obsession with human moral frailty, it discredited and damaged human beings' sense of themselves and their capacity for benevolence in ways that are with us still. Augustine insisted on kindness as the duty of man only; in this, claim Phillips and Taylor, he failed to understand that kindness could also be a pleasure and a spontaneous human response to the needs of others. Luther, Calvin, and Hobbes went further in this misapprehension, insisting even more ardently on the innate viciousness of human beings.

The pagan Stoics of the classical world had understood that the individual's happiness and even his selfhood depended upon others—on friendship achieved through kindness—and the "Enlightenment pagans" David Hume, Adam Smith, Lord Shaftesbury, and Rousseau revived this line of Stoic thought in the 18th century: "People were kind," these advocates of natural human kindness argued, "not because they were told to be but because it made them feel fully human. To 'love one another' was a joyous expression of one's humanity, not a Christian duty."

Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, for example, contended that we are innately sympathetic and that we instinctively imagine ourselves in the positions of others. Through this spontaneous sympathetic imagining, we feel what others feel (if to a lesser degree) and decide whether we approve or disapprove of their actions. Our sense of right and wrong is a product of our fellow feeling and we are, on Smith's model, deeply vulnerable to the sufferings and joys of others.

The rise of such benevolent theories of human nature had concrete social manifestations in the late 18th and early 19th centuries—not only a vogue for "moral weeping" and sentimental dramas, but reform movements committed to ending slavery, child labor, and cruelty to animals. In such movements, *On Kindness* suggests, one sees the real social power of believing in human benevolence and compassion.

But with the collapse of the French Revolution into violence and chaos—a Revolution whose leaders had built their principles of universal brotherhood and equality on Rousseau's theories of innate human sympathy and compassion—kindness, once again, lost its centrality in discussions of human nature and society:

> Kindness was steadily downgraded from a universal imperative to the prerogative of specific social constituencies: Romantic poets, clergymen, charity workers, and—above all—women. . . . By the end of the Victorian period, kindness had been largely feminized, ghettoized into a womanly sphere of feeling and behavior where it has remained, with some notable exceptions, ever since.

Unfortunately, we do not hear much about these exceptions (Dickens's novels, the political writings of John Stuart Mill and Thomas Carlyle), and so ends the interesting and coherent part of *On Kindness*.

What this intellectual history begins to suggest is that our conceptions of ourselves as a species can have tremendous social and political power. Reimagining how we work as moral beings, and whether we are benevolent or vicious, is not merely a sterile academic exercise but a potentially powerful means of changing how our social and political worlds work. Sadly, *On Kindness* is no such theory: Its authors betray their subject, as they insist our culture betrays it. They abandon their subject, the power of kindness to give pleasure as it creates connections between people, for muddled asides into Freudian theory and hasty accusations. ♦

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Battle for Italy

The hard war in Europe's soft underbelly.

BY EDWARD SHORT

The Italian Army after Caporetto, 1917

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

In May 1915 Margot Asquith, the British prime minister's wife, asked Admiral 'Jackie' Fisher, first lord of the admiralty, how things were going with the war: "As badly as they can," Fisher replied, "30,000 casualties in the Dardanelles. . . . I was always as you know against this mad expedition." Trying to say something positive, Asquith remarked on the recent entry of the Italians into the war on the side of Britain and France. "Mere organ grinders!" was the naval chief's response. "No use whatever."

Besides showing how blithely obliv-

The White War
Life and Death on the Italian Front, 1915-1919
by Mark Thompson
Basic Books, 480 pp., $30

World War One
A Short History
by Norman Stone
Basic Books, 240 pp., $25

ious the subjects of George V were to political correctness, this exchange points up how the Italian role in World War I was denigrated from the outset. War historians compounded matters by tending to cede coverage of the subject to Ernest Hemingway, whose *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) takes place against the backdrop of the Battle of Caporetto. Now, in *The White War: Life and Death on the Italian Front, 1915-1919*, Mark Thompson, a young Cambridge historian, remedies this neglect with a study that is as pioneering as it is brilliant.

Drawing on an impressive array of British, Italian, and Austrian sources, including fascinating interviews with survivors, Thompson re-creates the Italo-Austrian conflict in all its facets, including the diplomatic haggling that preceded it, the character of the two armies, their commanders, the home front, the battles themselves, and the harsh mountainous conditions in which the armies fought.

When war broke out in 1914, Italy opted for neutrality. A titular ally of Germany and Austro-Hungary, she had just celebrated 50 years of unification and was still deeply divided. Many people living under Italian rule were illiterate peasants for whom the idea of going to war to recover putatively "Italian" lands under Austrian rule was meaningless. Irredentists, sustained by the cult of Garibaldi, had their hearts set on recovering Trento and Trieste. The Socialists initially resisted the capitalists' war, though they eventually joined with interventionists to take what they could of the territorial booty promised by the dismantling of the Habsburg empire.

When Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti urged his countrymen to sit out a fight for which they were unprepared, he was branded a defeatist and driven from power. His successor Antonio Salandra, together with the foreign minister Sidney Sonnino, pressed for intervention. The compliant King Victor Emanuel III sided with his ministers. Sonnino sounded London and Vienna to see which would offer most in the way of territorial incentives. The Austrians refused even to consider ceding territory; it would only encourage other nationalists to start making their own demands. Sonnino then turned to London and asked for control of the Adriatic, including the South Tyrol up to the Brenner Pass, Trieste, Gorizia, Dalmatia, Valona in Albania, and the Dodecanese Islands between Greece and Turkey.

H.H. Asquith, reeling from the Dardanelles fiasco, instructed his foreign secretary Sir Edward Grey to give Sonnino what he wanted: Italy must be brought in "at once, greedy and slippery as she is." Winston Churchill summed up the Entente's view of their new ally when he referred

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to Italy as "the harlot of Europe."

Besides territorial greed, what motivated the Italian interventionists was fear of borderland upstarts. As Thompson points out, "the Slovenes were powered by the unstoppable energy of youth. Many educated Italians worried that their own civilization was torpid and exhausted; in Trieste, this worry sharpened into paranoid fear. History's next winners would prove their strength by trampling on the has-beens."

Thompson provides rich portraits of the commanding officers of both armies. Franz Conrad von Hötzendorf was a charming, popular, intelligent man who recognized that Austria's chances of victory were negligible: "Our purpose," he wrote his Italian mistress, "will be only to go under honorably . . . like a sinking ship." As Thompson points out, "[von Hötzendorf] was under no illusion about Austria's ability to win on three fronts. . . . When the short, victorious campaign of his public predictions did not come to pass, he blamed the politicians for dragging the empire into war before it was ready."

Luigi Cadorna was a myopic careerist who had entered military school in Turin at the age of 10. His ascent was swift: captain in 1880, major in 1883, colonel in 1892, major general in 1898, lieutenant general in 1905, and chief of Italy's general staff in 1908. When the king stepped aside and urged him to become supreme commander in 1915, Cadorna insisted on (and was given) absolute power. There would be none of the rivalries that bedeviled Garibaldi in 1866; Cadorna's ruthlessly unimaginative approach to war met with no opposition.

Of course, in the Great War, strategic obtuseness was not exactly uncommon. On the Western Front, after the French suffered 143,567 casualties at Loos (1915), Marshal Joffre resolved to intensify the fight: "We shall kill more of the enemy than he can kill of us."

Thus was born attrition, "that last resort of paralyzed strategy," as the poet Charles Hamilton Sorley put it, who was himself killed at Loos. Toleration for huge casualties became a staple of the war, and the Battle of Verdun was attrition personified, killing 700,000 men along a front of 15 miles. "The folly, the waste, and the stupendous courage of the men who fought at Verdun seem to belong to an age a thousand years removed from our own," writes the historian Alistair Horne.

The same could be said about the staggering attrition suffered by the Italians in the battles of the Isonzo (11 in all, and all of them defeats) along the 400-mile mountainous front, which the Austrians carefully fortified before the Italians entered the war. The Italians lost 300,000 men in these futile engagements, which followed an invariable pattern: The Italians attacked and the Austrians mowed them down from higher, defensive positions. At times, the carnage became so revolting that the Austrians urged the Italians to desist: "Italians! Go back! We don't want to massacre you," survivors recalled the Austrians calling out.

Thompson writes, "If there is any proof that such scenes played out on other fronts I have not found it." They attest to the unique odds against which the Italians fought—which were made worse by the singularly unforgiving mountainous terrain of the mostly static battlefields. Lack of camouflage, snow-blindness, and avalanches were persistent killers; and on December 13, 1916, which became known as "White Friday," 10,000 soldiers were killed in avalanches.

John Keegan has put the campaign leading up to Caporetto—when the Austrians finally went on the offensive and routed the Italians—in dispassionate perspective:

> In the circumstances it was highly creditable that the Italian army had persisted in eleven costly and fruitless assaults on Austria's mountain borderland. The incidence of an offensive every three months, between May 1915 and August 1917, was higher than that demanded of the British and French armies on the Western Front . . . shellfire on the rocky terrain caused 70 percent more casualties per round expended than on the soft ground in France and Belgium.

Moreover, the discipline meted out to the Italians was savage. After each defeat, Cadorna practiced the old Roman policy of decimation, randomly picking men from the ranks and executing them in a mad attempt to deter slackers. As Keegan writes, "It is unlikely that the British or Germans would have stood for such 'normal persuasion' and it is a tribute to Italy's sorely tried and dumbly uncomplaining peasant infantrymen that they did."

The statistics of Caporetto speak for themselves: The Italians lost 12,000 dead with 30,000 wounded; 294,000 were taken prisoner and 350,000 deserted. Only half of the army's 65 divisions survived the rout intact, and half the artillery was lost, including 300,000 guns, 300,000 rifles, and 3,000 machine guns, as well as 1,600 motor vehicles.

Caporetto was an unmitigated disaster. Indeed, as Thompson points out, "The prime fear of dissolution" to which the defeat gave rise

> survives in metaphor. Corruption scandals are still branded "a moral Caporetto." Politicians accuse each other of facing an "electoral Caporetto." . . . This figure of speech stands for more than simple defeat; it involves a hint of stomach-churning exposure—rottenness laid bare.

What is remarkable, however, is that even after this shattering collapse, the Italians emerged victorious. In all the annals of war there have been few reversals of fortune more phoenix-like than the Italian victory at Vittorio Veneto. In November 1918 Armando Diaz, a modest, humane, cautious man with strong administrative skills, succeeded Cadorna and, with the help of the British 48th Division under Lord Cavan, directed the advance of his armies over the Austrian border as far as the Tagliamento River. The spoils of victory were immense: Italy appropriated Trieste, the South Tyrol, Tarvisio, the Isonzo Valley, Gorizia, Istria, western Carniola, and Dalmatia—most of which, however, the

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Treaty of Versailles would revoke, thus opening the door to Mussolini's belligerent nationalism.

Outmanned and outgunned, the Austrians lost the Habsburg empire's last battle. Thirty thousand Austrian soldiers were killed and 300,000 to 500,000 were taken prisoner. Thompson quotes one Austrian referring to the retreat as weirdly calm: A "semblance of order" was "maintained by sheer force of habit, a march into nothingness."

The legacy of the Italian experience in the First World War continues to resonate. If some see the war as completing the Risorgimento, others see it as confirming the Italian hostility to statism. It also confirmed Italians' ingrained cynicism, the flip side of their vainglory. In this respect, the most perceptive commentator remains Hemingway, who has his hero in *A Farewell to Arms* confide: "I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice. . . . I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory. . . . There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity."

If *The White War* is the work of a bright young historian proving his mettle, Norman Stone's *World War One* is that of an established historian resting on his oars. Readers familiar with Stone's previous work will not be surprised by the excessive attention he pays to the Eastern Front. Still, for readers unfamiliar with the war, and even for Stone aficionados, much of what he writes in this glib conspectus will be of dubious use in helping them to understand why and how the war was fought. Like A. J. P. Taylor before him, Stone includes much here about railway timetables; he even writes Taylor-like paeans to the glamour of German power, citing Caporetto and the March 1918 offensive against the British as "displays of panache of which the plodders on the Allied side were utterly incapable." And yet Stone omits to explain why the plodders won the war, or indeed why they fought it in the first place.

Hew Strachan's one-volume overview is far superior. ♦

NEWSCOM

Exile's Voice

Between the cartoons and the Talk of the Town, deliberate erudition. **BY JAMES GARDNER**

It is fairly easy to dislike George Steiner.

An unapologetic know-it-all and acrobatic show-off, he is a gifted writer and linguist whose undeniable intelligence is broader than it is deep, and whose incessant posturings in print add up to something less than he inclines to believe. Though he is an adoptive American whose family fled the Nazis and came here when he was 10, he has lived much of his professional life in England and on the continent, and thus he seems so little American as to seem almost un-American.

George Steiner at 'The New Yorker'
by George Steiner,
introduction by Robert Boyers
New Directions, 304 pp., $17.95

George Steiner, 2001

But then, you could argue that his whole point is not to fit in anywhere. The modern writers whom he most admires are those elegantly displaced persons, exiles voluntary and otherwise, who wandered through the early and middle years of the 20th century: Conrad and Joyce, Beckett, Nabokov and Broch. It is for this reason as well that he has been, at best, a tepid supporter of Israel, since he views the Jewish condition as being essentially that of the Diaspora. Perhaps Steiner's one point of fixity is his identifying with the culture of Vienna, the city of his birth, but even there it is for a culture that was dying or dead by the time he was born, 80 years ago this year.

Coincident with his eightieth birthday New Directions has published this broad sampling of essays that he wrote for the *New Yorker* over three decades, from 1966 to 1997. True to type, Steiner does not exactly fit in at the *New Yorker*, either: His interests are too European, too unabashedly highbrow for the magazine. Though he can achieve, at times, a towering sarcasm, after the fashion of his revered Karl Kraus, he has little use for the moderated, recreational irony of that publication. Rather his preferred tone is one of hyperventilating conviction, elevated, intellectualized, and incessant.

The 53 essays included here, out of the 130 he wrote for the *New Yorker*, appear under four rubrics: History and Politics, Writers and Writing, Thinkers, and Life Studies. The last and briefest section comprises a mere three articles: on chess, the Oxford English Dictionary, and the University of Chicago, where Steiner studied as an undergraduate.

But those demarcations are artificial and ultimately unnecessary. For all of Steiner's work is always literary and always political. Thus he discusses Bertrand Russell as a writer, albeit in the Thinkers section, and Céline as a political creature, albeit in Writers and Writing. But to say that Steiner views culture politically is to risk suggesting that he has any sympathy for certain quarters of the left, which is far from the truth: first because few writers of our time have as unapologetically elitist a regard for high

James Gardner recently translated the Christiad of Marco Girolamo Vida *(Harvard).*

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culture as he has, and second, because his sense of history is far too dark and tragic for the left. If anything, he squares with Joseph de Maistre, whom he describes as "the great thinker of counterrevolution and antidemocratic pessimism."

For Steiner, the defining, immovable truth of modern times is the rise of totalitarianism in Germany and Russia (he has little to say of China) and the West's dysthymic response to it. The first three words of his essay on Simone de Beauvoir—"Our vexed century"—could serve as his personal devise. His is not, however, a tragic sense of life, as that would require the sort of prompt and expansive sympathy for man's existential plight that Steiner, at least publicly, does not avow. Rather he seems almost happy in his pessimism, as though, after many years, he has become so comfortable in his lugubrious dissent as to be oddly heartened by it.

Thus in an essay on Brecht from 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of communism, Steiner writes that "Marxism, being itself the product of an intelligentsia, notably in East Germany, felt committed to certain archaic, paternalistic ideals of high literacy, of literary-academic culture . . . [by which] much of what was shoddiest in modernity, in the media, in down-market entertainment was kept (partly) at bay." One has the impression that Steiner has come to feel a proprietary relation to the myriad tribulations of the 20th century and is loath to disown them any time soon, for all the satisfaction they bring him.

Because of these sundry attitudes it is easy, perhaps too easy, to dislike the man, or at least his writings. Ultimately, Steiner's great strengths far outweigh whatever weaknesses he has. In an age of diminished expectations, he is spectacularly ambitious. Everything is always at stake in all of his writings, as though history and the future of mankind itself hang in the balance. And so what if that is not the case? You have only to read a few salvos of his prose to understand just how spare are the aspirations of most of his latter-day colleagues of the scribal class, just how little faith they have in the power of words to do anything more than meet a deadline.

Steiner's abiding reverence for words is apparent in every sentence he writes. Yes, he has his silly tics. For some reason he seems to feel that he is accomplishing something valuable by making a plural out of words conventionally used only in the singular: "The vanities of eloquence . . . the aggressive certitudes of the self-taught man . . . [Guy] Davenport's publications are in fact privacies"—and so on. Then there is such euphonious palaver as "Masters of clairvoyant sadness . . . the annals of insight . . . the anonymity of the proverbial." Most of all, Steiner seems rather to indulge in the mellifluous methodologies of the nonscientific—if I may be pardoned a Steinerism of my own—and thus, in energetically overrating Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Steiner announces that it is "formed of dualities, binary oppositions, presences, values, codes of utterance in conflict."

And yet, for all his linguistic oddities, he has a rare sense of style. Take this wonderful opening of an essay on the French Annales historian Philippe Ariès:

> I do not know what goes on at the Institute of Applied Research for Tropical and Subtropical Fruits, outside Paris [where Ariès was director of information]. I prefer to imagine. There must be white-robed mandarins equipped with the panoply of competitive qualifications that in France are indispensable to every professional caste, from literati to chiropodists. . . . The seeds of a rare fly-eating plant, smuggled out of the New Guinea uplands, sprout in the window box. As the Institute is housed at Maisons-Laffitte, discreet libations are, from time to time, poured from the noble vintage of a kindred name.

From these few sentences it should be clear that few living writers can summon the syntactical powers of English as skillfully as George Steiner.

And just as Steiner does not write quite like anyone else, so he does not read like anyone else. At the risk of penning the sort of magniloquent generality that Steiner favors himself, a truly original reader is almost as rare a thing as a truly original writer. Most readers, even or especially professional readers—critics, students of literature, culturati, and the like—tend to read more or less the same things in more or less the same way. Those who are well read have consumed more of these things than others have, but they have consumed them to much the same purpose.

What is so impressive about George Steiner the reader is not how much he has read, but how inspired he has been in selecting the authors who mean most to him. It is here that Steiner's reverence for the exile, the displaced person, the "dépaysé," reaches its fullest fruition. Most people who take letters seriously view their native literature with a parochial, even tribalistic sense of proprietorship, just as they regard foreign literature as—foreign. But both of these postures necessarily entail a falsification of literature. Because Steiner is, in a sense, nowhere a native, it follows that he is foreign to no culture, at least no European culture. And so he can and does view the scattered artifacts of world literature as inhabiting a kind of free-floating critical ether, as partaking of an essentially transnational conversation.

Certainly, like all powerful critics, he errs on occasion, as in his bizarre assertion that Racine is "the greatest of all French writers." But what is so impressive about his essay on the Romanian-born French philosopher Emil Cioran is how he begins it with a history of the epigram in France and Germany. Surely it is one thing to research a subject in preparation for having to write about it: Any cultured and intelligent writer can pull that off with reasonable success. But in Steiner's case you have the sense that his familiarity with authors such as Chamfort and Vauvenargues, with La Rochefoucauld, Lichtenberg, and Nietzsche is the residue of many years of deep and passionate acquaintance.

There are always scholars, somewhere in the world, who are reading Ludovico Ariosto, Étienne Jodelle, and Luis de Góngora. But I know of no other important essayist in English who, like Steiner, has bothered to read these poets as a committed critic. For this and similar reasons, we need more writers like George Steiner.

Perhaps not many more, but surely a few. ♦

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Errors of Comedy

The basic question is a simple one: Do we laugh?

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

The Hangover
Directed by Todd Phillips

The Hangover is this year's *Superbad*, which was last year's *Knocked Up*, which was *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* of that year, which was the *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* of the year before that, and so on back to *There's Something About Mary* (1998)—an unabashedly filthy, foul-mouthed, animalistic summer comedy that both portrays the consequences of a lack of restraint and is an example of it.

There's no sense complaining that these movies are in bad taste or that they go too far; they wouldn't exist otherwise. So, even as one acknowledges that they are not a good sign about the health of our culture, that they only worsen the coarsening they represent, and that fare like this is driving people who want a bit of nice and easy entertainment away from movie theaters permanently, the only real question one can ask about *The Hangover* is: Is it funny?

The Hangover is about a bachelor party gone wrong. The groom, his two best friends, and his ne'er-do-well soon-to-be brother-in-law all travel from Los Angeles to Las Vegas. When the latter three wake up in the morning, the groom is missing, one of them has lost a tooth, a live tiger is unchained in the bathroom, and the aforementioned baby is in a car seat in a closet. None of them has the foggiest idea how any of it happened. The rest of the movie follows the three survivors as they desperately try to find the groom and reconstruct the events of the previous night.

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

The hirsute Zach Galifianakis, who looks like one of those drawings that attempts to convey the appearance of the earth's first man, is the child-man idiot who, told that someone has a ring his grandmother saved through the Holocaust, asks, "They gave out rings in the Holocaust?" Bradley Cooper is the hipster buddy who is desperate to play Rat Pack Guy even though he is a high-school teacher with a wife and child at home. And Ed Helms of *The Daily Show* makes a spectacular debut as a screen comedy presence in his role as a buttoned-down dentist—the movie's straight man, who turns out not to be quite as controlled as he appears.

So is *The Hangover* funny?

Well, it turns out the tiger is the property of Mike Tyson, the boys have somehow traded the hipster's MG convertible for a cop car, and that when they find the convertible, there's a gay, naked Korean gangster in the trunk. The gay, naked Korean gangster is played by an unheralded genius named Ken Jeong, who should be garlanded with roses and worshipped as a god for the wonders he does with a part that must have read, on the page, like nothing.

Sounds funny, right? The set-up is ingenious, and the farcical plot—the work of its director, Todd Phillips, and screenwriters Jon Lucas and Scott Moore—is well conceived. It's tighter, leaner, and better constructed than most summer comedies.

But, no: Except for moments here and there, *The Hangover* really isn't all that funny, or as funny as it ought to be. Watching the boys solve the mystery of the disappearing groom doesn't quite hold one's attention. In its final half-hour, *The Hangover* begins to resemble the story of a bender as told by someone who is now sober to someone else who has never taken a drink in his life—shocking at first, thrilling for a while, and then just dully repetitive.

I incline toward the view that comedy is transgressive by definition, should break rules, and justifies any moral failing through the generation of genuine humor and laughs. *The Hangover* doesn't manage to produce enough of either and, therefore, deserves to be considered both a failure and a disreputable one.

That is, until its final 90 seconds. In its final 90 seconds, *The Hangover* pulls a fast one by ginning up a final title sequence that is every bit as fall-on-the-floor hilarious as one could have wished for. It's also unimaginably, startlingly dirty, with a few split-second images that might properly belong in porn. In its closing moment, *The Hangover* really goes for broke, and pulls it off.

It's up to you whether a killer scene like that is worth sitting through a very long final half-hour. I won't judge you either way. ♦

Zach Galifianakis, Ed Helms, Bradley Cooper

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"Nearly everyone following the General Motors bankruptcy case is asking the same question: Who is the Chinese company buying GM's Hummer?"
—**Wall Street Journal** ***blog, June 3, 2009***

Parody

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Chinese Company Unveils 'Happy Family' Hummer

Latest Model Includes Tracking Device, 'People Mover'

By John D. Stoll

General Motors now concedes it knew little about the Tengzhong Heavy Industrial Machinery Company that acquired its Hummer brand of sport-utility vehicles last month. Ray Young, GM's chief financial officer, says he knew the Chinese firm made construction and road equipment but only recently learned where most of its revenue derives: from the printing of menus and the manufacture of billions of hot mustard, soy, and duck sauce packets.

"Having ordered take out from our favorite Chinese restaurant the other day," explains Young, "I tore into a soy sauce packet and noticed the fine print: 'Made in China by Tengzhong Condiments Division.' I'll be damned!" The CFO suspects that explains why negotiations over Hummer involved choosing one item from column A and another from column B.

Yang Yi, the CEO of Tengzhong, says he is proud of his company's diversity. "Besides paving the way for China's greatness, we make 'Chinese' sauces you Americans have become addicted to. God forbid you have a spring roll without duck sauce. You even put soy sauce on rice—isn't the food salty enough for you?" Mr. Yi admits the only source of net revenue loss comes from the hot mustard packets. "I don't know anybody who uses them—and I know about two million people."

Automobile analysts are still not sure what to make of the new "Happy Family" Hummer. The karaoke, explains Yang Yi, is specifically targeted to its Japanese customers. A PLA-version, known as General Tso's Hummer, includes an optional deep-fat fryer, but comes standard with heavy armor, a gun turret, and a contraption known as a "people mover" that attaches to the front grille. According to one Beijing official, the tracking device is used strictly for the purpose of roadside assistance. "All you need to do is call out for help. We can hear you."

Industry analysts expect brisk sales. "The great thing about Chinese Hummers," says one, "is that half an hour after you buy one, you're hungry for another." The Obama administration has expressed a mix of concerns regarding the takeover. On the one hand, 3,000 American jobs have been saved. (The employees are currently being reeducated at a facility in western China.) On the other hand, President Obama says he was not pleased with the redesign due to the amount of carbon

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